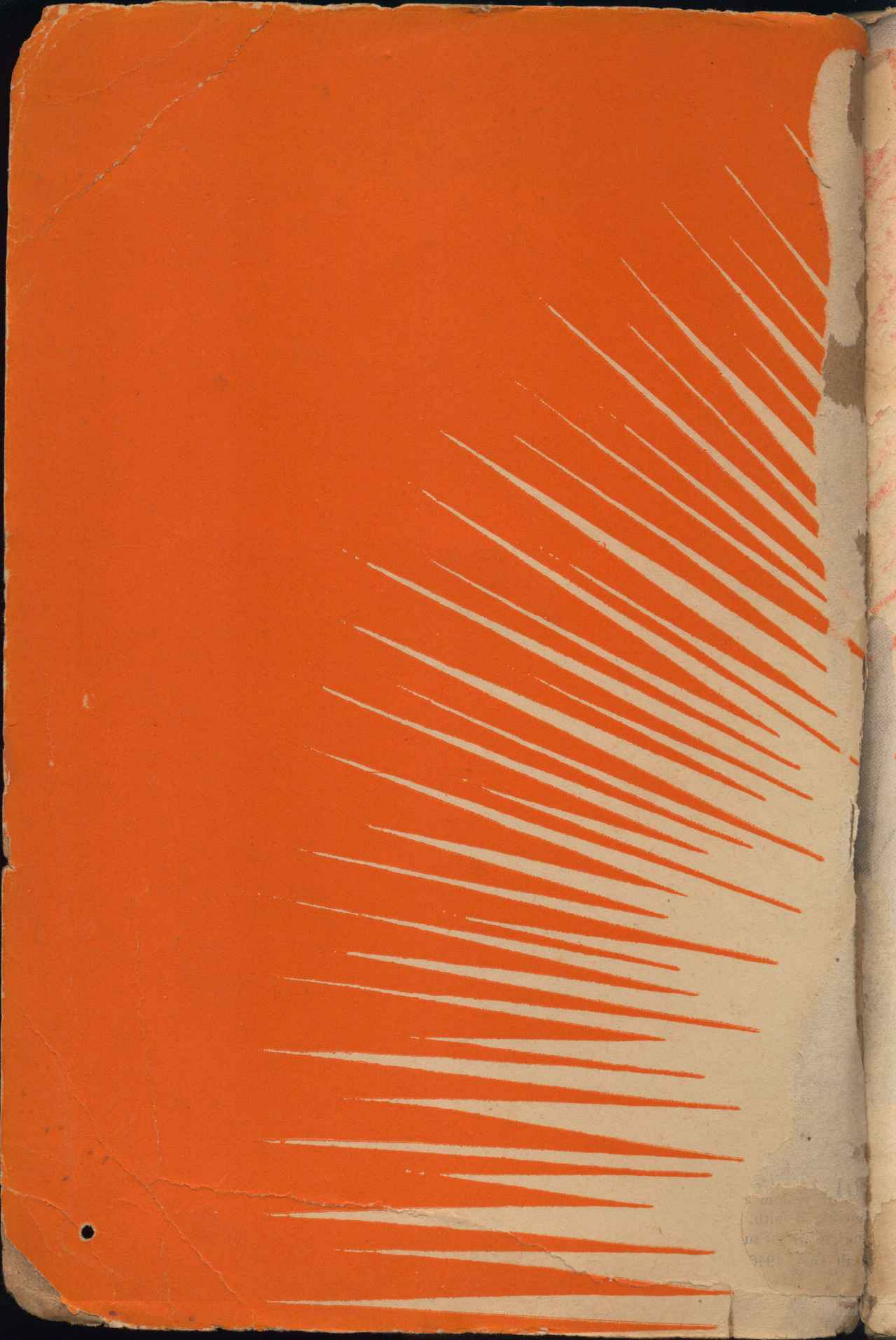




ᵣ of Liberty, great seer of human destiny, martyr of the world's sorrow, prophet of the hat visions of the future lie enshrined in the mystic temper of your eyes? What deep ' experience and fulfilment are guarded by those close compressed lips that have uttered ınd beauty and power? Serene in the midst of world tumults, oft defeated but always old in years yet ageless in spirit, you have been to myriads of struggling humanity the rpassing Love and Truth that conquers Death."

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—SAROJINI NAIDU

MAHATMA GANDHI
THE LAST PHASE

VOLUME I

BOOK - ONE

by

PYARELAL



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To
MAHADEV DESAI

I recognise no God except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions. . . . And I worship the God that is Truth . . . through the service of these millions.

MAHATMA GANDHI

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The first edition of this work was published in two volumes, Vol. I in 1956 and Vol. II in 1958. The former has been out of print for some time. The second volume will soon be out of stock. Hence this edition.

In response to requests from readers a popular edition is being brought out along with the standard one.

For special reasons the book was brought out originally in two volumes. For the sake of ease in handling, it is now being issued in four volumes. We hope this arrangement will be found more suitable.

Being wholly occupied with the preparation of his multi-volume biography of Mahatma Gandhi, the first part of which, *Mahatma Gandhi— The Early Phase*, has recently been published, the author could not revise the text for the present edition. A few errors noticed after the book was printed and some others pointed out by kind friends since, have been removed and some slight verbal alterations made by the author have been incorporated in the opening chapter. In all other respects, the text presented in the first edition has been followed unaltered.

26-1-'64

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This book was for special reasons originally published in two volumes, Vol. I in 1956 and Vol. II in 1958. The former has been out of print for some time; the second volume will soon be out of stock. For ease in handling it is now being issued in four volumes. In response to numerous requests from readers a popular edition is being issued simultaneously with the standard one.

Owing to my preoccupation with the preparation of *Mahatma Gandhi—The Early Phase*, Vol. I,* the third in the series, but the first chronologically of my multi-volume biography of Gandhiji, I have been unable to revise the text for the present edition. A few errors, noticed after the book was printed, and some others, pointed out by kind friends since, have been removed. A few verbal alterations in the opening chapter and a slight reshuffling of the matter in Chapter VI in Vol. II, "Wrestle With Darkness", have been effected. In all other respects, the text presented in the first edition has been followed unaltered.

In the Chapter "Brahmacharya" in Vol. II, I have incorporated in the body of the text some important matter from the "notes" and added some factual information that came to me after the publication of the book. For the rest the text remains unchanged. The key importance of this chapter for a full understanding of Gandhiji's philosophy of life cannot be overestimated.

Several works relating to the developments covered in *Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase* have appeared since its publication. For reasons already stated I could not take notice of them in this edition. But I have found nothing in them to warrant any modification of the narrative or the conclusions presented in *The Last Phase*. Rather, they confirm the thesis set forth here.

PYARELAL

AHMEDABAD,
9th February, 1965

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* Recently published by the Navajivan.

INTRODUCTION

The author of these pages, for a long time Mahatma Gandhi's private secretary and, after Mahadev Desai's death, editor of the *Harijan* weeklies, which Gandhiji was conducting, needs no introduction. His writings in *Young India* and *Harijan* and several works by him on Mahatma Gandhi published in Gandhiji's lifetime and after have well established him as a faithful and authoritative chronicler and interpreter of Gandhiji's life and philosophy. The present book deals with the last phase of Mahatma Gandhi's career. It is thus a continuation of *My Experiments with Truth* written by the Mahatma himself. That book deals largely with what may be called the formative period of his life, when he was preparing himself for the great work that lay ahead of him. The present book covers the story of the last years of his life in which the results of all the experiments that he carried out throughout his career were put to their severest and final test.

The obstacles which Gandhiji had to surmount were not always only on the physical or material plane; more often than not they were on the moral and spiritual plane. They came not always from his so-called opponents but on many an occasion from those with whom he had worked through the long period of thirty years since his return to India from South Africa, and on whom he counted to hold the torch aloft even after his body was reduced to ashes; whom he would not disown and who could not do without him. It is not possible or even desirable to attempt a summary of what is contained in these pages.

I shall only indicate by a few illustrations the difficult and delicate nature of the task, and the beautiful way in which the author has accomplished it, to prepare the reader for the rich fare awaiting him.

The theory of Satyagraha is nothing new. It was elaborated and enunciated long ago by Patanjali. Gandhiji's credit lies in the fact that he demonstrated its potentialities for solving individual and social problems, not only by living it himself but by evolving a technique by which it could be practised by the people at large and successfully teaching them its use. The method and procedure had to be changed from time to time to suit varied environment, circumstances, causes and problems that needed to be tackled; and above all according to the varied human material involved in each case. But the fundamental principle remained the same throughout. Gandhiji never attempted to write a systematic treatise to elaborate it but provided innumerable demonstrations of it in its application from day to day to the problems

that arose and called for solution—problems which concerned individuals no less than the community, the country, and humanity at large. The reluctance was due to the inherent nature of Satyagraha itself. Satyagraha is a living principle; it cannot be summed up in inflexible set formulas. It has to be cultivated by following a discipline, a way of life. It calls for correct understanding of the principles, but more than that their correct application to different situations and problems. It was, therefore, not the theory that mattered but its practice. "As a matter of fact," wrote Gandhiji, "my writings should be cremated with my body. What I have done will endure, not what I have said and written. I have often said . . . that even if all our scriptures were to perish—one *mantra* of Ishopanishad was enough to declare the essence of Hinduism, but even that one verse will be of no avail if there is no-one to live it."

This calls for a comprehensive, authentic and detailed record of what he did, how he did it and why he did it. It is only such a record of the varied and variegated panorama in which small deeds and great fall in their true perspective that a true, faithful and soul-stirring, life-giving and enchanting picture of Mahatma Gandhi's life and teaching can be found, to be contemplated, absorbed and enjoyed (सत्यं शिवं सुन्दरम्). The present work represents such an attempt for those who may be interested in it by one who had the opportunity to observe and know at first-hand the incidents and events which he has described and has the acumen and insight to interpret them correctly.

Take for instance Gandhiji's application of the principle of Truth and Ahimsa in life to problems which almost every leader of men and affairs has to face from day to day. He had the unique capacity to carry on his struggle on an impersonal plane so that opponents became less and less resistant and were ultimately won over. In the end there was no victor or vanquished feeling left, both became fellow-seekers of the same truth. In this technique there is nothing like failure; every experience is a discovery and stepping-stone to success. That is perhaps the reason why in Gandhiji's company one never had a feeling of despondency or defeat but always of steady progress towards the goal in spite of apparent failure and set-backs.

Another universal principle which is only another facet of Gandhiji's fundamental conception of Truth and Ahimsa and which needs to be very carefully studied by every student of Gandhiji's life and teachings, is expressed in the aphorism यथा पिंडे तथा ब्रह्मांडे—as the microcosm so the macrocosm. When things go wrong, Gandhiji said, one should try to look for the cause thereof within oneself, if one wants to realise the non-violent way of life. The same truth is embodied in a host of other sayings, e.g., "Do unto others as you wish others to do unto you"; "Evil done to others comes home to roost"; and finally Jung's:

"Anything which disappears from your psychological inventory is apt to turn up in the disguise of a hostile neighbour, where it will inevitably arouse your anger and make you aggressive. It is certainly better to know that your worst adversary is right in your own heart." But it was left to Gandhiji, as the reader will find in these pages, to make a scientific application of it in his life and activity and demonstrate its capacity to open up new avenues of action when otherwise there was nothing but a blank wall facing one.

The earliest demonstration in India—and in a sense the most remarkable because it happened at a time when Mahatma Gandhi had not attained the great public stature which he did later in life—of his method, which is seen in action in its full maturity in this book, was in Champaran. For a hundred years or more British planters had been carrying on plantation of indigo from which dye was derived, and in doing so had not only acquired a lot of land from the landlords and cultivators but had also by various oppressive methods forced them to cultivate the land with large resulting profits to themselves and misery and suffering to the tenantry. Protests and agitation with occasional outbursts of violence resulting in murder and arson had availed nothing. The first thing that Gandhiji did on his arrival in Champaran, when he went there on the invitation of the cultivators to investigate their grievances, was to declare that he did not look upon the planters as enemies and wished them well. This was unintelligible at that time not only to the planters who stood to lose all their unjust and long-enjoyed profits but also to many of us. The planters received the declaration with incredulity, even suspicion. But these were turned into an agreeable surprise and even amazement as their contact with him developed and they came to know him better, and by the time the report of the Commission which the Government appointed to inquire into the tenants' grievances, and of which Mahatma Gandhi also was a member, was made they came to esteem him as a true friend of theirs, as the sequel proved it beyond a shadow of doubt. Apart from the magic of his personal contact, what impressed them most was his conduct as a member of the Commission. There was a large volume of evidence—drawn mostly from records of judicial proceedings and reports of successive officers of the Government over a period of several decades—supporting and confirming almost every allegation of oppression, corrupt practices and recalcitrance against the planters and their agents, and there was no escape from a most damaging indictment of the planters and their agents, if the Commission put on record its findings on them. But at an early stage of the discussion after evidence had been recorded, Gandhiji set the fears of the planters' representative on the Commission at rest and completely won his confidence by declaring that he was not concerned with the past so much as with the present and the future and would not insist on a finding on the complaints being recorded; he

would be content if the oppressive system of indigo plantation was abolished and the planters' tyranny ceased. He did not insist on full reparation either for the exactions made in the past but said he would be content with refund only of part — twenty-five per cent. of the amount exacted — as a guarantee that no more exactions would be made. The result was a compromise which pleased both sides — the tenants were happy that indigo plantation with its concomitant tyranny and oppression would go; the planters who had already made their pile were happy that they were not condemned before the whole world as oppressors and tyrants or made to disgorge the whole of the amount illegally realised by them. Legislation was passed with the support of their representative in the legislature. They paid monetary subscriptions and, with the exception of one or two, otherwise helped Gandhiji in starting and maintaining village schools for the education of the children of the tenantry. Within three or four years, finding that the cultivation of ordinary crops was not as lucrative as cultivation of indigo, they gradually sold away their land in small bits to the very cultivators whom they had oppressed so long and were happy to get a good price for it. The tenants were happy to get back the land and get rid of the planters and where their luxurious bungalows stood, tenants' houses including their cattle-sheds are to be seen today all-over the district.

What made Mahatma Gandhi almost unique among leaders of men was his capacity to harmonise and co-ordinate widely different, sometimes even opposite points of view so that instead of hindering the prosecution of the common goal, they became complementary and contributory to its attainment. An outstanding instance of this was the way in which he dealt with his colleagues in the Congress organisation who differed from him. It can well serve as a pointer for workers in all organisations where many have to work together and cannot get on without the fullest cooperation notwithstanding differences of a fundamental nature. In 1921 there was unanimity amongst all Congressmen and Khilafatists as regards the practical programme although there was not cent per cent. agreement in regard to the underlying principle and many had mental reservations. But after Mahatma Gandhi's incarceration in 1922, clear-cut differences of opinion in regard to the practical programme of work came to the surface, particularly in regard to the question of seeking election to and entering legislatures under the constitution of 1920. This created a split in the Congress: one group led by Deshbandhu C. R. Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru, N. C. Kelkar, M. R. Jayakar, Hakim Ajmal Khan and other Swarajists supporting what came to be known as Council entry, and the other led by C. Rajagopalachari, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Seth Jamnalal Bajaj opposing Council entry. In the open session of the Congress held at Gaya in December 1922, where Deshbandhu Das presided, the resolution

opposing Council entry was passed by a large majority despite the fact that no less a person than the President himself had put in a strong plea in favour of Council entry in his presidential address. The controversy continued until in a special session at Delhi in the latter half of 1923 a compromise was reached which permitted those who wanted to contest elections to the legislature to do so provided that they did so on behalf of the Swaraj Party, which had been formed by them, and not on behalf of the Congress and no Congress funds were used. The elections held in November-December, 1923, were fought and won by Congressmen on behalf of the Swaraj Party. When Mahatma Gandhi was released early in 1924, as a result of serious illness in jail, he set himself to bring about a compromise between the two wings, although he himself held firmly that Congressmen should not enter the legislatures and agreed with the so-called no-changers. At a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Ahmedabad, a vote was taken not on this question directly but on another matter which had the support of Deshbandhu Das and Pandit Motilal Nehru. They with their supporters walked out and their proposal was defeated by a small majority in their absence. But Mahatma Gandhi instead of claiming victory, as constitutionally he was entitled to, declared that he was humbled and defeated. On the death of Deshbandhu Das a few months later, he took a further step. He declared that parliamentary activity had come to stay and in recognition thereof, made over the Congress organisation to the Swarajists for the prosecution of the Council-entry programme, himself taking charge of what was called constructive work and founded the All-India Spinners' Association for the revival and spread of Khadi. As a result at the next elections, in 1926, the Congress achieved an even greater success than in 1923. At the same time, the work of the revival and spread of Khadi went ahead with great speed. Both the wings helped each other without giving up their respective convictions. Later on when active Satyagraha had to be adopted and carried out, those who had entered the legislatures on behalf of the Congress came out and voted Mahatma Gandhi to be the dictator of the Congress for implementing the Satyagraha programme.

A similar if somewhat more difficult situation arose in 1940-41, when India was declared by the British Government as a belligerent country in the Second World War. The British Government wanted all-out support of the Congress in its war effort. Within the Congress there were many who were prepared to give such all-out support provided the British gave India power and responsibility and full share in the administration, including defence and war effort. Mahatma Gandhi was prepared to give moral support only and was opposed to giving help in men and money in any circumstance. The matter was discussed by the Working Committee and when Mahatma Gandhi

could not convince his colleagues, he withdrew from the deliberations of the Congress Working Committee and left those from whom he differed to carry on without any obstruction from him or even opposition in the session of the All-India Congress Committee on his behalf or on the part of those who agreed with him. The British Government did not, however, accept the Congress offer and so the question of Congress co-operation did not arise. In spite of the rebuff, however, many in the Congress continued to harbour the hope that as the fight thickened the British Government would relent and enlist the cooperation of the Congress on Congress terms. The discussion with Sir Stafford Cripps in early 1942 was carried on in this hope. But instead of relenting, the British attitude stiffened and the Indian opposition to the war effort expressed itself in the slogan *Na ek bhai na ek pie*—not a single recruit nor a single pie. Individuals offered Satyagraha by advising others not to help the British war effort in any way and courting imprisonment for doing so. The candidates for offering Satyagraha were selected by Gandhiji himself. The bulk of them were elected representatives of the people such as members of legislatures, district boards and municipalities, Congress Committees and other elective bodies, showing that the people as a whole were opposed to Government war effort. This movement culminated, after the failure of the Cripps negotiations, in the "Quit India" movement of 1942, when Mahatma Gandhi was once again offered and took up the leadership of the Congress. This movement resulted in the wholesale incarceration of Congressmen and Congress supporters who remained behind prison bars until about the end of the war in 1945.

The difference of Mahatma Gandhi with his colleagues was fundamental. Gandhiji was not prepared to make any compromise on the issue of non-violence. He refused to be a party to any form of effort in support of a violent war even if what looked like Swaraj could be obtained in return. But while holding to his own principle, he allowed his colleagues full scope to serve the country according to their light. One result which flowed from this was that not only mutual confidence between them remained unimpaired and most intimate and personal relations continued between them but also those who differed from him ultimately came round and worked under his leadership, giving up for the time being their own programme.

The same regard for the opinion of his colleagues, although he differed from them most intensely, was illustrated by his attitude on the question of the partition of the country. He was uncompromisingly opposed to the partition of India which he had called her "vivisection". All Congressmen—whether Hindus or Muslims or of any other faith—were equally strong in their opposition to the two-nation theory and the demand for partition. But the picture changed after the experience of the Congress leaders in the Interim Government. Congress

accepted office and Congress leaders became Ministers in the Central Government in September, 1946, as a result of successful negotiations with the British Government, with Mahatma Gandhi's approval. The Muslim League agitation for the partition of the country continued and resulted in serious rioting in different parts of the country. Later when the Muslim League joined the Central Government, its members refused to cooperate with the Congress Ministers even in matters about which there was no difference of opinion. The Central Government felt powerless to maintain peace and order or to restore it if it was disturbed in Provinces owing to lack of homogeneity in the Central Cabinet where the Muslim League members constantly put obstacles in the way of their Congress colleagues. The Congress leaders who were in the Government felt that it was impossible to carry on the administration in such conditions. They felt that it was better in the circumstances to let the Muslim League have Pakistan so that they might actively and effectively run the administration at least in the areas which would be left after partition. Gandhiji was pained and tortured beyond measure by the mob violence and hooliganism which broke out in many places on account of the propaganda of the Muslim League, and the counter-violence which it provoked, but he was not prepared to abjure the one-nation theory and accept in its place the two-nation theory propounded by the Muslim League, or even to take the help of the army for suppressing the riots which he said could and should be controlled by popular leaders by appealing to the better instincts of the people of all communities and immolating themselves if necessary in the attempt to quell the insanity. Partition based on a wrong theory and brought about by such questionable means, he was certain, would do irretrievable harm to both Hindus and Muslims—India and Pakistan. But he left it to those who were actually in the Government and in charge of running the administration to act according to their judgment instead of following his. Once they decided in favour of partition, he did not oppose them, although he never concealed from them or the country his own opinion. At the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee which considered this question he vigorously supported the stand taken up by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel against those who wanted to raise the standard of rebellion against the old Congress leadership. He did not remain inactive either. Instead of carrying on a propaganda against his own colleagues and setting up factions, he set about with an amazing energy to repair the vast damage to the country and particularly to communal harmony and peace which preceded and followed partition. His words became commands, his mere presence sometimes sufficed to check the blaze where the police and the army would have felt powerless or could have succeeded only after much bloodshed. It is this last phase of his life and activity which is particularly dealt with in this book with

insight, understanding and restraint, and with meticulous regard for accuracy.

India achieved independence but at the cost of her unity. This was not the independence that Gandhiji or Congress had set out to achieve. But Gandhiji saw in it no reason for despair; it was not non-violence that had failed but their practice of non-violence or rather his technique in inculcating the non-violence of his conception on the people. He set about to remedy the flaw. Some of the most fascinating pages of the book are devoted to describing the working of his mind in search of new techniques and the plans that had begun to form in his mind for setting India on the road to the realisation of the new social order of his dreams in the changed circumstances — an order based upon unity and peace, equality and universal brotherhood and maximum freedom for all. The time had arrived when with all the experience gained and prestige acquired in the course of the Indian struggle for freedom which he had conducted for more than thirty years, Mahatma Gandhi could extend the ambit of his activities and take up causes in even more inauspicious circumstances and hostile conditions and thus prove that Ahimsa could work wonders even in the most adverse of circumstances. At this stage he was taken away. But the horoscope of his experiment is not yet exhausted and the ideas and forces that he has released may yet accomplish after his death things undreamt of and even more marvellous than were witnessed in his lifetime.

The work which he had taken in hand was not only the achievement of political freedom but establishment of a social order based on truth and non-violence. This unfinished part of his experiment was perhaps even more difficult than the achievement of freedom. In the political struggle the fight was against a foreign power and all could and did either join in it or at least wish it success and give to it their moral support. In establishing the social order of his pattern, there was a lively possibility of a conflict arising between groups and classes of our own people. Experience shows that man values his possessions even more than his life because in the former he sees the means for perpetuation and survival through his descendants even after his body is reduced to ashes. That new order cannot be established without radically changing men's mind and attitude towards property and at some stage or other the haves have to yield place to the have-nots. We have seen in our time attempts to achieve a kind of egalitarian society and the picture of it in action after it was achieved. But this was done by and large by the use of physical force. In the result it is difficult if not impossible to say that the instinct to possess has been rooted out or that it will not reappear in an even worse form under a different face. It may even be that like gas kept confined within metallic containers under great pressure, or water held behind a big dam, that breaks the barrier,

reaction will one day sweep back with a violence equal in extent and intensity to what was used to establish and maintain the outward egalitarian form. This enforced egalitarianism contains in its bosom the seed of its own destruction. The root-cause of class-conflict is possessiveness or the acquisitive instinct. So long as the emphasis is on possession, and more possession, higher and still higher standard of living, the acquisitive or possessive instinct will remain. So long as the ideal that is held up to be achieved is one of securing the maximum of material satisfactions, possessiveness is neither suppressed nor eliminated — that were like trying to put out fire by pouring petrol instead of water — but grows by what it feeds upon. Nor does it cease to be such — it is possessiveness still whether it is confined to a few only or is shared by many. If egalitarianism is to endure, it has to be based not on the possession of the maximum of material goods, whether by few or by all but on voluntary, enlightened renunciation — denying oneself what cannot be shared by others or can be enjoyed only at the expense of others. This calls for substitution of spiritual values for purely material ones. The paradise of material satisfactions that is sometimes equated with progress these days neither spells peace nor progress. "With the best will in the world," the great thinker and psychologist Jung has warned us, "we cannot bring about a paradise on earth and even if we could, in a very short time we should have degenerated in every way. We should take a delight in destroying our paradise, and then, just as foolishly, marvel at what we had done."

Mahatma Gandhi showed us how the acquisitive instinct inherent in man could be transmuted by the adoption of the ideal of trusteeship by those who have for the benefit of all those who have not so that instead of leading to exploitation and conflict it would become a means and incentive to the amelioration and progress of society. The difficulty in achieving this ideal is tremendous and a man of penance like Gandhiji alone could have achieved it on a mass scale. What Gandhiji wanted was something in the nature of what Vinoba Bhave is attempting today. He wanted people to produce and to possess not for themselves alone but for all, and to regard possession in excess of one's own requirements — upon which, too, a voluntary check was to be put — as theft. This is the only egalitarianism that can be lasting and it can be founded only on the rock of Truth and Ahimsa.

The central core of Gandhiji's teaching was meant not for his country or his people alone but for all mankind and is valid not only for today but for all time. He wanted all men to be free so that they could grow unhampered into full self-realisation. He wanted to abolish the exploitation of man by man in any shape or form because both exploitation and submission to it are a sin not only against society but against the moral law, the law of our being. The means to be compatible with this end therefore, he said, have to be purely moral, namely,

unadulterated truth and non-violence. He had been invited by many foreigners to visit their countries and deliver his message to them directly but he declined to accept such invitations as, he said, he must make good what he claimed for Truth and Ahimsa in his own country before he could launch on the gigantic task of winning or rather converting the world. With the attainment of freedom by India, by following his method, though in a limited way and in spite of all the imperfections in its practice, the condition precedent for taking his message to other countries was to a certain extent fulfilled. And although the partition had caused wounds and raised problems which claimed all his time and energy, he might have been able to turn his attention to this larger question even in the midst of his distractions. But Providence had ordained otherwise. May some individual or nation arise and carry forward the effort launched by him till the experiment is completed, the work finished and the objective achieved!

RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN,
NEW DELHI
NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1956.

Rajendra Prasad

PREFACE

Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase has a fortuitous history. I had intended to follow up my earlier publication *A Pilgrimage for Peace*, which describes Gandhiji's mission to inculcate non-violence amongst the North-West Frontier Pathans, with a companion volume of about the same size covering the story of his "do or die" mission in Noakhali as a preliminary to his full biography. But two English friends, who saw the manuscript, were decidedly of the opinion that unless the story of his mission in Bihar also went between the same covers, the picture presented would be incomplete and lop-sided. I saw the force of their argument and decided to include the story of his mission of peace and healing in Bihar also in the proposed volume. As I proceeded with my task, however, I became, for the first time, aware of certain facts and developments of which I had so far only a very dim and second-hand knowledge, as I was at that time away from Gandhiji in Noakhali, where Gandhiji had left behind all his old companions to carry on his work of re-establishing communal harmony, when he himself had to go to Bihar, and then to Delhi. The inner significance and poignancy of the picture thus revealed was so overwhelming that it made everything else appear trivial in comparison, and so abandoning the earlier title *The Lonesome Way* that had been suggested for the story of Gandhiji's peace mission in Noakhali and Bihar, I decided to extend the scope of the book so as to present to the readers a full, detailed and authentic story of the last phase of Gandhiji's life in which his spiritual powers are seen at work at the height of their maturity and which provides glimpses of the farthest reaches of his mind and spirit in pursuit of the quest for the secret of the power that could control power and provide an answer to the challenge of brute force and the contradiction between democracy and abundance, equality and individual freedom, progress and peace with which the present-day world is confronted. And so pages in the earlier draft grew into chapters and paragraphs into pages and sections. The book itself had to be divided into two volumes. The first volume deals with the period from his release in 1944 up to the time of Lord Mountbatten's arrival in India; the second volume carries the story to the end of his life.

I must confess that I was hardly aware of the colossal nature of the task and the tremendous difficulties, abysses and pitfalls in the way when I launched on this venture. If I had known beforehand, I might well have hesitated or at least proceeded differently. There were

serious gaps in the information; many phases of delicate and intricate discussions between Gandhiji and his colleagues and negotiations with the representatives of the British Government that preceded and followed independence-cum-partition were unrecorded. Sometimes the record existed but was either inaccessible or else withheld; at times the actors in the drama, as they put it, were so "terribly discreet" that later they themselves were unable to explain cryptic references in their recorded correspondence, or recall the events and happenings to which they referred. To interpret the record correctly and fully in the absence of those who alone could have done full justice to it, to fill in the gaps, to make disjointed bits of information fall in their proper places and yield a clear, coherent meaning, and unravel the tangled skein of the story with the help of clues hunted up from collateral sources of evidence called for Job's patience, a faculty of divination (to which I could lay no claim) and some deft sleuth-work—very interesting but extremely time-consuming. It was only by a reckless expenditure of time coupled with some providential chance contacts and the pointers provided by Gandhiji's letters to me during the period under review and what he had shared with me during the last two months of his earthy sojourn when a merciful Providence again enabled me to be near him that the work could be completed.

Soon I discovered, too, that there was hardly a comment of importance on men and events in this crucial period or a conclusion based thereupon that I could record but provoked a challenge. That made it necessary to cite appropriate chapter and verse in every case in support of my statements and conclusions. Hence the close documentation which the reader will find in these pages, which to my deep chagrin has added to the bulk of the volume.

In preparing these pages, I have drawn upon, in the first instance, on Gandhiji's office records, his own writings in *Young India* and *Harijan*, and statements and interviews to the Press, and his personal correspondence including jottings, instructions and scribblings, when he was observing silence, on odd bits of paper which I had carefully preserved. As he sometimes humorously put it, Gandhiji was a very "fiend of destruction" so far as papers and documents—which he classed with "earthly possessions"—were concerned. Important correspondence, if one side of the paper was blank, was often promptly turned to use as scribbling paper, or treated as "matter out of place" if it did not lend itself to that use, unless somebody removed them to safety in time or rescued them from the waste-paper basket. But in Noakhali and after, knowing my passion for collection and preservation of scraps of paper having a bearing on his life and activities, and knowing that others might be free from that addiction, he sometimes used to pick out choice morsels and send them to me as "love tokens" in Noakhali.

I had, besides, my own notebooks and diaries as well as notebooks and diaries of some other members of his party and my own first-hand information either from him or from others to go by. Last but not least, I have relied on his own journal which he began specially to keep for me to make up for my absence from him when, to "throw himself on God alone" at the time of the second Simla Conference in May, 1946, he sent away his entire secretarial staff to Delhi (see pages 195-96). This journal was continued right till the 25th July 1947. It used to accompany him wherever he went. But unfortunately after his passing away, the original notebooks could not be traced and so never reached me. The portion from the 6th October, 1946, onwards, however, was made available to me in copy by Manu Gandhi, who had taken it down from the original which used to be in her charge. The earlier portion and the original notebooks seem to have been irretrievably lost.

In giving quotations from Gandhiji's speeches and oral interviews, I have taken liberty to amplify or revise the language of the published version with the help of the original notes when the published version, prepared in the hurry of the moment either by me or by some other member of Gandhiji's staff, was slipshod or inadequate. I have spared no pains to check up and verify reported information by reference to the actors in the drama concerned wherever possible or to some other reliable source, to ensure accuracy. This took a lot of time, involving as it did inter-continental correspondence with people who were each and all preoccupied with their own public duties.

After great deliberation I have given as full a treatment as was possible in the circumstances to the delicate and difficult issue dealt with in the chapter on *Brahmacharya* (in the present edition included in Vol. II) as being fundamental and integral to Gandhiji's philosophy of life, and on account of the great importance he himself attached to it and his own injunction to me in that behalf. I have included, too, in the discussion on Brahmacharya a brief description of the mortificatory and spastic techniques for the attainment of sublimation to contra-distinguish them from Gandhiji's way and to bring out the latter's distinctive significance.

This book is not a verdict on men and events — though men and events are discussed in it — but only an attempt to understand and explain certain events and the actions of the men who made those events and in the process were themselves made by those events, in the context of Gandhiji's great experiment to discover the Law of Love and how it could be applied to solve the problems that face the present-day world.

A word to the Indian reader, to whom this book is primarily addressed. We invoke the name of the Father of the Nation on all important occasions. In crises we instinctively ask ourselves what he would

have done or expected us to do in the circumstances. It is vital for us to know the road on which he set us and that by which we arrived and where the two bifurcated. We must understand where we are today and whither bound and whether that is the goal which the Father of the Nation had envisaged for India of his dreams, and if not, what that goal was and what we must do to reach it. Almost the first thing a foreign visitor does on arrival in India is to visit Rajghat—if he happens to be an official guest or otherwise an important personage, he is escorted there—to pay homage to the Father of the Nation. Before he leaves India, he invariably ends up by asking: Where is Gandhi in India of today? That is a question which everyone of us owes it to himself, to India, for whom Gandhiji lived and died, and to the world to ask and answer. This book is an attempt to help us turn the searchlight inward and find the answer.

PYARELAL

TOWN HALL,
NEW DELHI
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CONTENTS

PART ONE

ON THE EVE

PART TWO

THE GATHERING STORM

ILLUSTRATIONS

MAHATMA GANDHI—THE LAST PHASE

Part One
ON THE EVE

CHAPTER I

THE DAWN OF FREEDOM

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very heaven.

1

"Are you joking?" asked Gandhiji surprised.

"No. I am serious," replied the Inspector General of Prisons. "I received the order just today. You can continue to stay here for some time for convalescence, if you like. But the guards will be removed at 8 tomorrow morning."

It was the 5th May, 1944, one month before the landing of Allied Forces on the Normandy beach for their final assault against Hitler, which was to end in Germany's defeat almost to the day eleven months later. Col. Bhandari, the Inspector General of Prisons, Bombay, had turned up suddenly in the evening—a rather unusual time for such a visit—at the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp at Poona, where Gandhiji was being kept incommunicado, and told him that he and his party were to be unconditionally released at 8 o'clock the next morning.

Gandhiji had by this time recovered from his first shock. "What happens to my railway fare?" he asked half in jest half in earnest with a smile. Under prison regulations a prisoner is entitled to the fare back to the place of arrest.

"You will have it whenever you leave Poona."

"All right. Then I will stay in Poona for two or three days."

"Now, please, do not come back again," the Inspector General of Prisons added. "See, my hair has turned grey with worry."

Thus ended the spell of twenty-one months of prison life—Gandhiji's last—for giving the British Government the ultimatum on the night of 8th August, 1942, to declare India independent and quit, so that India could defend herself untrammelled against the Japanese invasion and effectively play her part in the defence of democracy.

For days and nights before the event, the air had been thick with rumours about his removal from Poona. Three days earlier, the Inspector General of Prisons, when he visited the Camp, had casually inquired if in the opinion of doctors Gandhiji was fit to undertake a hundred miles journey by car or train. But questioned further about it, he had been mysteriously silent.

Gandhiji had repeatedly requested the Government to remove him from the Aga Khan Palace to any ordinary prison. The idea that he was responsible for the heavy expenditure of renting and maintaining that big,

though, as the American news magazine *Time* rightly described it, shabby bungalow, with a huge armed guard round it, oppressed him deeply. "It is not their money they are spending," he exclaimed. "The money belongs to me—the poor masses of India. And why do they want to keep a huge guard for me? They know I won't run away."

Friends outside had been agitating for his removal from that place because of its association with the death of two dear ones—Kasturba Gandhi, his wife, and his secretary, Mahadev Desai. The place was highly malarious. He had himself contracted malaria and had been running high temperature for sometime past. And this had exercised the minds of the jail authorities.

The atmosphere was tense in the Camp. Everybody felt that a transfer was imminent. Would they remove him to an ordinary prison? Would they break up his party? Could Gandhiji's health stand the strain of such changes? These were the questions that had troubled all of us except Gandhiji. He was worried about one thing only; he must cease to cost the country so heavily.

As for release, the idea did not enter his mind at all. He was convinced that the Government would never release him before the end of the war, and certainly not on grounds of health. There was no prospect of the war coming to an early end, and so he had come to the conclusion that he would be staying in prison for seven years at least, out of which he had hardly completed two.

While the party spent practically the whole night packing, Gandhiji lay awake in bed absorbed in deep thought. All eyes were turned on him. Would he be able to fulfil their expectations? He looked unhappy. Illness in prison he regarded almost as a sin in a Satyagrahi. "Is it really on grounds of health that they are releasing me?" he asked himself, but immediately collecting himself remarked: "Well, it is only right for me to take their word at its face value."

At 7.45 a.m. on the 6th May, the Inspector General of Prisons came. Gandhiji took his walking stick and made a move.

"No, Mahatmaji, wait a few minutes more," the Inspector General smiled.

At the stroke of eight, the Inspector General led the way and Gandhiji passed out of the barbed wire.

As the car drove up to Parnakuti—Lady Thackersey's mansion—where Gandhiji was to stay in Poona, he became pensive. He was thinking of Kasturba and Mahadev. "She had been so eager to get out of prison. Yet I know she could not have had a better death," he murmured. "Both she and Mahadev laid down their lives at the altar of liberty. They have become immortal."

2

Two years later—and forty-four months after the famous "Quit India" demand of August, 1942, for which he and the Congress were put

into prison—in March, 1946, Gandhiji was staying in Uruli Kanchan, an idyllic little village near Poona, engaged in expounding to the simple village folk his pet hobby—nature-cure—which in the evening of his life had become a passion with him, when he received a pressing personal message from the British Cabinet Delegation to meet them at Delhi in the first week of April, 1946, to discuss with them how the British could most expeditiously quit India. The special messenger, Sudhir Ghosh, bearing the message, escaped death miraculously by the late arrival of his chauffeur, so that he missed the Royal Air Force plane by which his seat was booked, and which, half an hour later, crashed, all the occupants being instantaneously killed.

The message from Lord Pethick-Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India and the Leader of the Cabinet Delegation, read: "I am greatly looking forward to seeing you again to renew the acquaintance and friendship which began some 40 years ago. . . . Before I left home my wife told me if I saw you to give you her very best wishes."

Sir Stafford Cripps, an old friend and another member of the Delegation, wrote: "I feel the very heavy burden of our present efforts and the necessity for all the help that we can have, and no help can be more welcome and wise than that which you can give."

The Cabinet Delegation continued their labours through the months of April, May and June, and then on the 29th June, left Delhi to return home to report. After their departure Lord Wavell, the Viceroy, continued the effort which they had initiated, and on the 24th August, announced the formation of an Interim National Government to replace the Viceroy's Executive Council, with Pandit Nehru, the Congress President, as the Vice-President of the Government. The Muslim League declined to join the Government on the ground that it had not been given the right to nominate all the Muslim members in the Cabinet.

On the 2nd September, the Congress Ministers took office after receiving Gandhiji's blessing at an impressive little ceremony at his residence in Bhangi Colony. For Gandhiji it was a day of deep heart-searching. In the early hours of the morning, whilst most slept, he scribbled a short message for the members of the new Government, to remind them that they must not in the hour of fulfilment forget to redeem the pledges which they had made when the Congress was in the wilderness.

At the appointed time in the morning, the Ministers arrived. They were received by the lady members of Gandhiji's entourage with garlands of handspun yarn. The message which Gandhiji had written out for them in the morning, it being Monday his day of weekly silence, was read out to them. It was his "instrument of instructions". Brief to the point of baldness, it ran: "You have been in my thoughts since the prayer. Abolish the Salt Tax. Remember the Dandi March. Unite Hindus and Muslims. Remove untouchability. Take to Khadi."

This was followed by a short prayer and each of the Ministers in turn received Gandhiji's resounding benedictory slap on the back as he bowed to him for blessing.

Outside in the *shamiana*, before Gandhiji's room, the floor was strewn with flower petals. The incense burnt. The doorways were hung with green leaves. Overhead fluttered two dainty national flags. There was an atmosphere of tense, subdued emotion. For once Pandit Nehru, boastful of his agnosticism, forgot his swagger. A statement which he issued that day characteristically opened with the sentence: "Although I am not used to prayer, it is in a prayerful mood that I approach this task."

Amplifying the substance of his message to the Ministers, in a soul-stirring address at the evening prayer gathering, Gandhiji hailed the auspicious day, for which India had long waited, as a red-letter day in India's history. He congratulated the British Government for having resolved an age-old issue between Britain and India by peaceful settlement. This was no time for recalling old wrongs or reviving bitter memories. The Muslim League had not come into the Government; the Muslims were observing the day as a day of mourning. It was up to Hindus and others, therefore, to try to come as close to them as possible by abstaining from jubilation, rejoicing and other exuberant manifestations. The proper way to observe solemn occasions as enjoined by Hinduism, Islam and Christianity alike, was by fasting rather than feasting. They should utilize the occasion to turn the searchlight inward and try to find out if they had really done their Muslim brethren any injustice. Similarly, it was wrong for the Muslims to regard the Hindus as their enemies and to seek to forget that they had lived together as good neighbours for centuries, were nourished by the same soil and were destined to return to the same: "All those who are born in this country and claim her as the motherland are brothers. Our mortal mother, who gives us birth, is entitled to our reverence and worship. Such worship purifies the soul. How much more worthy of our common allegiance and reverence must our Imperishable Mother be then, on whose breast we are born and shall die."

After the installation of the Interim National Government, Gandhiji was anxious to return to his Ashram at Sevagram as early as possible but was prevailed upon by the members of the new Government to prolong his stay at Delhi, to give them the benefit of his sage advice and guidance at the outset of their career. And so, he continued to stay through the month of September in the grilling heat and choking dust of the Imperial City.

3

The seventy-seventh birthday of Gandhiji fell on the 2nd October, 1946. It brought a shower of greetings from all over the world. One of the most touching, perhaps, was from Lady Pethick-Lawrence:

"Gandhiji," she wrote, "the month of October brings the anniversary of your birth into this world of conflict—conflict between powers of good and evil. May you see during the coming year still further fulfilment of your prophetic vision. . . . Our inspired poet William Blake wrote:

> 'I give you the end of a golden string
> Only wind it into a ball,
> It will lead you in at Heaven's gate
> Built in Jerusalem's wall.'

"Jerusalem was the symbol used by Blake of his vision of the Kingdom of Heaven which, he believed, would be finally established on earth. And his golden thread was the practice of forgiveness.

"And you also have put this thread in our hands, which is for each of us to unwind in our day-to-day practice—the thread which will bring us safely through the intricate maze of circumstances and release us into the 'Kingdom of Heaven'.

"Your life and being have enriched the human race and will always remain as part of the Light which shines in the darkness. May all faith and joy be yours at the time of the celebration of your birthday."

To it Gandhiji replied: "Have you ever noticed that my ball is an unending ball of cotton thread instead of Blake's 'golden string'? Blake's was the imagination of a poet, mine can become now and here the gateway to heaven if the billions of the earth will but spin the beautiful white ball of the slender and unbreakable thread!"

In reply to Lord Wavell's message of greetings, he wrote: "The birthday began to be observed only when it became identified with the revival of the spinning-wheel in its modern form, making it the symbol of freedom of the masses through constructive means. Can you in any way identify yourself with the rebirth of the wheel?"

To Gandhiji the spinning-wheel was a symbol and means of identification with the dumb millions. They were his first care and his last. For, he recognised no God "except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions".[1] The significance of the spinning-wheel had flashed upon him in a moment of intuition in South Africa, even before he had seen one, and in fact did not know a spinning-wheel from a handloom![2] It was on the point of extinction when he arrived on the Indian scene. He had tried ever since to resurrect it for over a quarter of a century with his life-blood.

Sir Stafford Cripps wrote: "You have devoted so many years to the cause of Indian freedom that I hope you may live long (to 125 years at least)[3] to see the results of your labours come to a full fruition of happiness for your people. These are difficult days, but nevertheless we are progressing in the right direction. . . . A few short steps and the great act will have been completed and then we can all rejoice together in this accomplishment of Indian freedom."

But God has his own way of answering men's prayers. The Muslim League's decision to come into the Interim Government was announced on the 15th October. Gandhiji now felt free to return to Sevagram Ashram, where a number of appointments were awaiting him, and 27th October was fixed for his departure. But on the same day on which the League's decision to join the Government was announced, news came of widespread communal rioting by the Muslim community in the Muslim-majority district of Noakhali in East Bengal. There were wholesale arson, looting, forced conversions and forced marriages, murder, abduction and rape. An indescribable darkness seized Gandhiji's soul and instead of returning to Sevagram, he set out for Noakhali with the end of Blake's "golden string" in hand to unravel. Little did anyone dream at that time that he was setting out on a "Do or Die" mission which would end, fifteen months later, in the supreme sacrifice of the 30th January, 1948. On that fateful Friday, he passed from mortality into the presence of that

"light unsufferable,
And that far-beaming blaze of majesty"

pointing the way of deliverance to strife-sick humanity. The swelling tempest of insanity that had threatened to deluge the whole subcontinent was instantaneously stilled, old antagonisms and enmities were for once forgotten, and warring communities disengaged themselves from their fratricidal death-grapple to mourn in common humanity's loss.

But to get at the springs of that story, we have to go back to the "Quit India" struggle of 1942, and subsequent events leading to the Transfer of Power.

CHAPTER II

AT THE CROSS-ROADS

There's a power that bends our hands,
To mightier issues than we planned.

1

THE SECOND World War flung a challenge in India's face, when she was declared a belligerent country by the British Government without her consent. So keen, however, was nationalist India's desire to play her part in the defence of democracy that the landslide in favour of helping the British war effort continued in spite of repeated rebuffs and refusal on the part of Great Britain to give her the chance to do so effectively or with self-respect. Frustration was writ large on every face. Impotent resentment choked the nation's soul at being kept in shackles when the invader was at her gate and a world war threatened to submerge human values. India dared not remain a passive spectator while her own fate and that of humanity hung in the balance.

Out of that deep frustration was born the "Quit India" cry.[1] Never were conditions less favourable for launching a non-violent struggle. To many it seemed sheer madness. But Gandhiji's resolve was made. "Even if all the world's nations oppose me," he said, "even if the whole of India tries to persuade me that I am wrong, I will go ahead not for India's sake alone, but for the sake of the world."[2] With an inner certitude and determination, which staggered everybody, he overcame all opposition and rallied round him his "old guard" for one more fight—the last, the biggest and the best—against alien domination.

The British Government seemed to be more afraid of losing India to independence than to the enemy. Gandhiji did not want the people out of sheer bitterness and frustration to disgrace themselves by welcoming the Japanese invaders. It was for him a moral issue—an act of faith. Come what may, India must not lose her soul.

To the sceptics he said: "I know the country is not ready to offer civil disobedience of the purest non-violent type today. But a general who runs away from action because his soldiers are not ready, writes himself down. God has vouchsafed to me a priceless talent in the weapon of non-violence. If I hesitate to put it to use in the present crisis, God will not forgive me."

Pandit Nehru, torn by an inner conflict between his deep sympathy with the democracies, particularly China, and his detestation of unregenerate British Imperialism "saw and heard the passion in his eyes"

as he discussed with Gandhiji the pros and cons of the situation and realised that "as a whole that passion was the passion of India". Before that mighty urge, "petty arguments and controversies became small and without much meaning". Congress took the plunge.

The "Quit India" resolution of 8th August, 1942, marked the turning point in the history of India's freedom struggle. As Gandhiji put it, it was a "demand made upon Britain to do the right irrespective of the capacity of the party wronged to bear the consequences of Britain's right act."[3] It was "not a slogan but a potent cry of the soul" of India struggling for self-realisation. It swept away at a stroke and rendered obsolete the remnants of the old controversy of Dominion Status *versus* Independence. Unconditional withdrawal of the British Power thereafter became the *sine qua non* of the settlement of the Indian question. The communal problem had hitherto been used by the British Power as an excuse for their refusal to quit India. It now became the very reason and justification for the "Quit India" demand. The constitution of India was no longer to be dictated by England; it was to be framed by Indians alone. The "Do or Die" era had commenced.

* * *

By putting the Congress Working Committee in prison at a swoop while it was still trying to negotiate for a peaceful settlement and letting loose an avalanche of "leonine violence", the authorities were able for the time being to put down the exuberant manifestations of the "Quit India" struggle. But the spirit which it had released kept marching on. Once more the inner voice of the man of penance proved a truer prophet than the arithmetic of political wisdom. In less than five years the seditious slogan of August, 1942, became the official programme of action of the British Government, and before long even "Quit India" was outmoded and gave place to "Quit Asia".

Immured behind the double cordon of an armed guard and the barbed wire isolation of the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp, Gandhiji became the symbol of India's unconquered and unconquerable soul and a beacon of faith and hope to the people. While Churchill had been preparing President Roosevelt for a possible British surrender to the Nazis by a successor Government when his own country was threatened by an invasion, Gandhiji had been preparing his unarmed countrymen to resist to the last man rather than submit, if the Japanese landed on Indian soil.[4] But he was now vilified in the world's Press by the British wartime propaganda as pro-Japanese and a fifth-columnist, and denied the elementary right to defend himself which even a common felon can claim. Field-Marshal Smuts, his erstwhile opponent whom he had fought for twenty years in South Africa, in righteous indignation exclaimed:

> It is sheer nonsense to talk of Gandhi as a fifth-columnist....He is one of the great men of the world and he is the last person to be placed in that

category. He is dominated by high spiritual ideals.... Whether those ideals are always practicable in our difficult world may be questioned, but that Mr. Gandhi is a great patriot, a great man and a great spiritual leader who can doubt?

During the war the propaganda machine of the belligerent countries had free field. But truth could not be suppressed. The Bengal famine of 1943-44, during which unclaimed corpses of the victims of starvation choked the streets and vultures tore out the vitals from the dying in Bengal's metropolis, and which, according to official report, exacted a toll of one-and-a-half to two million lives, startled the conscience of the world. Among the members of the British fighting forces that had come out to India, there were many who saw in the Draconian regime that had been clapped down on the country to suppress the freedom struggle, a negation of all that they were supposed to be fighting for and they unequivocally registered their protest against it. Wrote one such to Gandhiji:

> Many of us, conscripted soldiers, have...said that the only solution (of the Indian problem) is...a request that you be asked to use every available means to implement the very right "Quit India" proposal. Another point I raised with my M. P. was this: What is my position as a soldier of His Majesty's forces, if I am called upon to take up arms against people I love? I intimated that I should refuse to do so. We did not come into this army to fight an imperialist war, and I for one won't.[5]

As a protest against false propaganda, and as the only way of sharing the suffering of his people while he was kept in prison, he launched on a twenty-one day fast. "A form of political blackmail", "an easy way out"—snapped the authorities. Their answer was to collect enough sandalwood for his cremation, double the number of the armed guards round the Detention Camp, and to complete their arrangements to suppress any popular demonstrations that might follow upon his death. Observed Bernard Shaw:

> It (Gandhiji's imprisonment) and the unpardonable flogging business associated with it have wiped out our moral case against Hitler. The King should release Mr. Gandhi immediately as an act of grace unconnected with policy and apologise to him for the mental defectiveness of his Cabinet.

But he was not released. Nor did he die. Jail gates which had flown open at the commencement of the fast shut once again as soon as it was over. Two of his closest comrades—his devoted secretary for twenty-five years, Mahadev Desai, and Kasturba Gandhi, his wife, who had been his constant companion in all his life's struggles—were cremated under his very eyes in the shadow of the Detention Camp. It might have shattered the nerves of anyone and caused him to waver or lose faith. But Gandhiji stood firm as a rock without a trace of bitterness or doubt or despair, and continued to bear witness to the justice and innocence of his stand,

making the "Rock of Ages" his refuge. "I agree with you," he wrote to Lord Wavell, the Viceroy, from prison, "that whilst you hold the views expressed in your letter . . . the proper place for one like me is . . . prison. And unless there is a change of heart, I am quite content to remain your prisoner."[6]

Accordingly, he asked his surviving comrades to be prepared to end their days in prison as Mahadev and Kasturba had done, and chalked out for them and for himself a six years' programme of self-discipline, study and spiritual striving, behind the prison bars. He craved only to find "heaven's success or earth's failure"; his penance deepened, and it is no exaggeration to say that there was not a soul engaged in India's struggle for independence, whether inside or outside prison, those days but felt strengthened and uplifted by it.

Neither threats, nor cajoling, nor repression could secure from him or from the Congress Working Committee members, who continued to be kept in Ahmednagar Fort as prisoners, a recantation or withdrawal of the "Quit India" resolution. It served only to drive the steel into the people's soul and alienated even moderate opinion. The Muslim League and the Congress, still divided on the fundamental political issue, joined hands on the parliamentary front and threw out the 1944 budget of the Government of India. Remarked Sir Yamin Khan, a prominent Muslim League member, on the floor of the Central Assembly that he was grateful for the wrongs done by the Government. He thought the actions and misdeeds of the Government had brought the Congress and the League together, and they had come so near to each other as to demonstrate to the world that they had no confidence in the Government.

At last Gandhiji was stricken down by an illness which brought him almost to death's door. At one stage the inner light, which had sustained him all through life, seemed to be on the point of going out. But it was momentary only. Just when the night seemed darkest, and all hope extinct, the prison doors suddenly flew open, and he was unconditionally released.

The British authorities did not want a third death on their hands in the Detention Camp on top of the other two. They felt Gandhiji was dying. The British Foreign Office had even issued a directive in anticipation of his death, over the signature of Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, as to how his obituaries should be written. On the day on which Gandhiji was released in India, a copy of it was distributed to the British Information Offices. A copy was received at the Chungking office, when Dr. Radhakrishnan, the well-known Indian savant and philosopher, happened to be there. It was to this effect: In case of Gandhi's death do not diminish his moral stature, acknowledge his uncompromising allegiance to unworldly ideals, express regret that his unrivalled influence was not at the service of the Allied Nations, especially China and India.

But obviously God wanted to take some more work out of him. Contrary to the fears of the people and the expectation of the British Government, the Mahatma did not die.

2

Before leaving the Detention Camp, the party paid their final homage to their two departed comrades by reciting prayers and offering flowers at the spot where they had been cremated, as they had done every day since their death. In a letter to the Government, Gandhiji wrote:

I wish to put on record...that by reason of the cremation of the corpses of Shri Mahadev Desai and then my wife, the place of cremation...becomes consecrated ground....I trust that the plot will be acquired by the Government....I would like to arrange for the upkeep of the sacred spot and daily prayers.[7]

Khan Bahadur Kately, the Camp Superintendent, had come to Gandhiji on the previous night and said: "Tomorrow morning when you go out, I shall be standing on duty as a servant of the Crown in uniform. So I have come now to take your blessings." In the morning, after the prayers, he presented him with a purse of rupees seventy-five in anticipation of his seventy-fifth birthday, and said: "Mahatmaji, you will receive many purses outside, but let Kately's be the first." The relationship between the jail officials and Gandhiji had ceased to be that of jailer and prisoner. They had all become members of his wider family.

As the Mahatma's car reached the barbed wire wicket it was stopped and a notice was served upon Dr. Sushila Nayar, my sister, who had been detained with him as his medical attendant, that she was not to communicate to anyone outside, happenings inside the Detention Camp during their period of incarceration.

"Is there no order for me?" inquired the Mahatma.

There was none. His was unconditional release.

"Sign it," he said to Sushila, who looked perplexed.

The rest of the party—Dr. Gilder, Mirabehn (Miss Slade), Manu Gandhi, his grand niece, and myself—also signed the notice in turn.

The authorities were afraid, and rightly, that the Mahatma might refuse to go out if they sought to put any restriction on him. Obviously he was free to say or do anything he liked. It made nonsense of the order served upon the rest!

Later in the day, Dr. Gilder began to dictate Gandhiji's daily health bulletin: "As compared with his condition during the last twenty-four hours, Mahatma Gandhi . . ."

"Breach of the prohibitory notice!" one of the company remarked.

The Mahatma had a quiet laugh. He commented: "The order is couched in such wide terms that they cannot expect anyone to obey it!"

In spite of the sleepless night which had sent up his blood pressure, and the excitement of the morning, Gandhiji felt better than usual. He attributed it to Ramanama which he had been repeating the whole night. "I wanted to sleep but could not. So I practised what I have often preached: 'Repeat Ramanama a thousand times, a million times, ten million times, and in the end it is bound to bring you peace.' I am feeling fresh. But I must confess I have never felt so much at a loss as today. I do not know what I shall do or speak. But He that has guided my footsteps so far will show me the path. I have confidence, He will give me the right word at the right moment."

Telegrams poured in from all sides inquiring about his health and expressing joy at his release. Amongst them was one from the venerable Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya: "Thank God, He has heard prayers of vast millions and set you free to breathe fresh air. Have every hope, He will let you live a hundred years to serve motherland and mankind."

Gandhiji wired back: "At a stroke you have cut off twenty-five years. Add twenty-five to yours!" The allusion was to his (Gandhiji's) last speech in the All-India Congress Committee before his arrest in August, 1942, when he had said that he would like to live and serve the country for 125 years.

A similar message from Rajaji, whose health was never too robust, brought back the reply: "Physician, heal thyself!"

A high official, who had seen the confidential medical reports about Gandhiji received by the Government, sent word: "Tell him to go slow. He does not realise how grave his condition is." But it was more easily said than done. Rest was what he needed most, and that he could not have. There were crowds of visitors, relatives, close associates, and co-workers. They had a right to unbosom themselves to him, and he was not the one to refuse them solace even at the risk of his life. The result was that at the end of his five days' stay at Poona, Gandhiji felt weaker than when he had left the prison. "The days of peace are over," he exclaimed. "In prison one had perfect peace."

It was decided to shift him to Juhu, a quiet seaside resort near Bombay, where he had gone to convalesce also after his release from the Yeravda Central Prison, following upon an appendicitis operation in 1924. The Government had booked a second-class compartment for him and his party. As a prisoner he had travelled first-class. But as a free man he was from the masses and of the masses. He could not be at peace unless he travelled as they did—third-class!

The wife of the Inspector General of Prisons came to see him off. It was at the house of her father, a veteran Congressman of the Punjab, that Gandhiji had often stayed as guest during the non-cooperation days in the early twenties. She entreated: "Mahatmaji, if you ever think of going to jail again, please do let us know beforehand so that my husband can go on leave!"

At Gandhigram, Juhu, Sarojini Naidu, who had been a co-detenu with Gandhiji in the Detention Camp at Poona and like him had been released on grounds of health some time earlier, planted herself as his gate-keeper and watchdog to protect him from the curiosity of the crowds, importunate visitors and intruders. Hers was a difficult and delicate task. But she did justice to it as she alone could have done. Unmindful of her own frail health and need for rest, she stood guard over him like a mother-tiger over her cub, vindicating the affectionate nickname of Ammajan (mother dear) which Gandhiji had given her.

Many came, many had to be turned away. But the one who came and saw and conquered was a poorly-clad urchin of about ten or twelve. He had waited the whole morning to have Gandhiji's *darshan*. He placed before him fruit worth two or three rupees. One of Gandhiji's party took him for a beggar boy and said something to that effect. The youngster's pride was hurt. "No, Mahatmaji, I am not a beggar. Ever since I heard of your release, I have been working as a coolie and have earned the money to make my humble offering." Gandhiji was deeply moved. "Come and eat yourself the fruit of your labour," he said to him, and offered him the fruit that he had brought. But the boy would not touch it. "If you eat it, Mahatmaji, it will fill my stomach," he answered, and triumphantly walked away with a beaming countenance.

Gandhiji's convalescence proved to be slow. While it provided to the authorities perhaps some not unwelcome relief, it created many a headache for the doctors in attendance. Apart from the malaria, he had come out of the Detention Camp—like the rest of the party—with hook-worm and amœbic infections. It had brought on acute anæmia. But the Mahatma refused to take any drugs. He had been forced into a compromise when he took quinine in the Detention Camp. He had ever regarded it as a moral defeat and a denial of his faith in God. When the doctors pressed their medical arguments to overcome his reluctance, he told them, it was a part of his faith and his faith was indivisible. If he began by yielding on a matter of vital belief in one thing, where would the process end? People might call it obstinacy, but was it not his obstinacy that was sustaining him in his struggle for India's freedom? After a sleepless night he declared his complete independence of the doctors. The change was mainly psychological—spiritual. It freed him from the feeling of oppression, and restored his self-confidence. Next day when a friend asked him, how he was, he replied: "If you had put me this question yesterday, I should have been at a loss for an answer. But today I can say that it is well with me, for during the night I have got back what I had lost for a while—a living faith in God. He is the Master-physician—the Great Healer."

The physicians in attendance—they included Dr. B. C. Roy, Dr. Gilder, Dr. Gajjar, and Dr. Jivraj Mehta, all of them leading lights of their profession—were not the ones to give up easily. They told him

that they were not to exercise any control over him; they would instead put themselves under his control. As men of science it was for them to offer advice which he, as a nature-curist, was free to accept or reject. The arrangement worked. It left him ample room for making experiments and taking risks in terms of his faith. But sometimes ticklish situations arose. He had agreed to take a patent yeast preparation for his anæmia. But to their dismay the doctors found that its price had rocketed up to a fabulous height during the war. A phial cost about Rs. 65. As a representative of the poor the Mahatma had made it a point of principle to be as stingy in the matter of expenditure on himself as he alone could be. The friends and doctors held a "council of war" and it was decided as a "top secret" that in case of need information would be volunteered that the phial in question had been found by a friend from his "old, pre-war stock" ! Luckily, the inconvenient question was never asked and the author of "My Experiments with Truth" was spared the ordeal of a very doubtful experiment with truth!

A few days later a homœopath came to elicit his symptomatology. Gandhiji had no faith in homœopathy. He had no faith in allopathy either. His faith was in nature-cure. But his late comrades and colleagues Deshabandhu C. R. Das, "the uncrowned king of Bengal", and Pandit Motilal Nehru had always wanted him to give homœopathy a trial. It was out of regard for their memory and because he had not "faith strong enough in God and what the five elements can provide" that he had agreed to the homœopath's visit.

The physician began by asking Gandhiji about his family history. When and what did his father die of?

"He had a fall, developed fistula, and died at the age of sixty-five."

That did not help. The physician proceeded: "What did your mother die of?"

"She became a widow and died of a broken heart!"

The physician was getting a bit impatient. "What about your memory?" he asked.

"As rotten as you can imagine. I have lost the memory for details. If you can give me back that gift, I shall become your unpaid advertising agent," Gandhiji replied with a twinkle in his eye.

"God alone can give these gifts, Mahatmaji," replied the friend. "I cannot do so, however much I may like your offer."

"Then give it to me without any offer!"

The friend changed the argument. "Do you remember, years ago when you went to visit the Mission Hospital at Hardwar, I took you round?" The physician especially emphasised the last part of the sentence.

"Yes, I remember visiting the Hospital at Hardwar," replied Gandhiji.

The physician was apparently pleased. He quickly put in: "Then your memory is quite good."

"No," said Gandhiji. "I do not remember you at all!"

The physician felt discomfited. He had been jotting down his observations. He now handed the sheet to Gandhiji for verification. It ran: "Temperament—very intelligent; given to philosophic and religious studies. . . ."

Gandhiji put a big question mark before the data on temperament.

The irrepressible Dr. B. C. Roy, who was sitting nearby, put in: "To these you should add one more—the habit to question any allegations of virtue!"

The physician smiled. "That is modesty," he remarked.

"Modesty has never been my weakness," Gandhiji interposed, and there was a roar of laughter.

"This is how I bring my blood pressure down," said he when the laughter had subsided.

3

India that greeted Gandhiji on his release was India humbled and humiliated but unsubdued. Mr. William Phillips, President Roosevelt's Special Envoy to India, had been refused permission to see Gandhiji in prison, and declared *persona non grata* by the British Government. The "Quit India" movement was being carried on mostly by workers who had been driven underground. The Indian National Army, which had been formed out of the Indian army personnel that had surrendered to Japan during the war and had been fighting for India's freedom under the leadership of Netaji Subhas Bose against the British on the Burma front, had been forced to retreat from Indian soil. The immediate threat of the Japanese invasion had been removed but the wartime squeeze continued unabated in spite of the spectre of the Bengal famine, which had now begun to cast its shadow over other parts of the country as well. Repression under the ordinance regime was in full swing: The Press was gagged, thousands filled the jails, the Congress was in prison, judgments of courts were rendered nugatory by fresh ordinances. No-one's freedom was safe. All attempts of the Liberal and other Nationalist leaders to break the deadlock between Congress and the British Government had failed. "There is deep resentment and a keen sense of frustration at large," observed Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, the Liberal leader. "It is unwise in the larger and abiding interest of India and England to allow the present state of things to continue."[8]

While the whole country was thus groaning under the heel of British military might, Gandhiji was suddenly released into the vast concentration camp that was India. But it made all the difference. India heaved

a sigh of relief. The captain was back at the helm once more to steer the ship safely through the stormy waters to the cherished goal of independence.

A period of uncertainty followed. What did the release portend? Did it connote change of policy on the part of the British Government in regard to the Indian question? Or, would they again take him back to prison as soon as he had tided over the crisis in his health? There was such a ring in the official communique announcing his release. Mr. Amery had stated that he had been released "solely on medical grounds". Mr. Shinwell referred in Parliament to his release as "temporary".

"The country expects much from me," wrote Gandhiji to Dr. Jayakar, the Liberal leader. "I am not at all happy. I feel even ashamed. I should not have fallen ill. I tried not to, but failed at length. I feel that they will imprison me as soon as I am declared free from the present weakness. And if they do not arrest me, what can I do? I cannot withdraw the August resolution. . . . It is the breath of life for me."[9]

To Srinivas Sastry, another Liberal leader, he wrote: "I feel like being in a wilderness. The so-called freedom jars. But God is our help. And so I take heart."[10]

Neither of these two letters was meant for publication. But a garbled version of the letter to Dr. Jayakar somehow leaked out. The full text, consequently, had to be released to the Press. The Viceroy later made a grievance of it. But it infused new life into the people. Gandhiji had entered the prison twenty-one months before. When he left it, it was a sepulchre. But the flag was unlowered, the colours unsullied. The "Do or Die" slogan still held. The centre of gravity again shifted to the arena of the people's struggle where the battle of democracy against Fascism and Nazism was truly being lost and won.

But Churchill's Government had made up their mind that come what may, they would not allow any change in the political status of India, at least during the pendency of the war. On the very day on which Gandhiji was released, Lord Halifax, in the course of a speech at Washington, declared that the Atlantic Charter contained nothing that had not been British policy for half a century! "Simple self-determination," he added, "would not work in the case of Palestine and India because of the existence of religious and racial problems." But undeterred, and without standing on ceremony, within six weeks of his release—and even before he had fully recovered—Gandhiji set about to woo the Viceroy for a settlement. As a Satyagrahi, he was always prepared to go more than halfway to meet the opponent.

"Though there is little cause for it," he began his first letter to Lord Wavell after his release, "the whole country and even many from outside expect me to make some decisive contribution to the general good." But he could do little or nothing, he added, unless he knew the mind of the Working Committee of the Congress. He, therefore, requested the Viceroy

to allow him to see them. "I pleaded as a prisoner for permission to see them. I plead now as a free man for such permission." If the Viceroy wanted to see him before deciding, he said, he would gladly wait on him wherever he might want him to.[11]

The Viceroy wrote back that since Gandhiji had recently made public his adherence to the "Quit India" resolution (the reference was to the publication of Gandhiji's letter to Dr. Jayakar), "which, I am afraid, I do not regard as a reasonable or practical policy for the immediate future," he could not agree to Gandhiji's meeting the Working Committee members. He would not meet Gandhiji either because he felt that "in consideration of the radical difference in our viewpoints" a meeting between them at that stage "could have no value and could only raise hopes which would be disappointed".[12]

This was nothing to be surprised at. Only two days before Gandhiji's release, Mr. Amery, who had the gift of always rubbing susceptibilities on the raw whenever he opened his lips on the Indian question, had stated that he could not permit any intercourse between Congressmen inside and outside prison. Gandhiji's release had raised widespread hopes, not only in India but even outside, that it would be followed by the release of other Congress leaders, and lead to a solution of the Indian political deadlock. Lest any such unhealthy sentiment should gain further ground, Mr. Amery took care promptly to nip it in the bud by categorically stating that the release "was not effected with the intention of releasing other Congress leaders". On the day before Gandhiji wrote to Lord Wavell, in answer to a question in the House of Commons whether in view of the freedom enjoyed by Gandhiji he would not consider the whole question, the redoubtable Secretary of State for India replied: "Not at this moment." The door was thus shut, barred and bolted even before Gandhiji had knocked.

That left little room for hope for settlement from the British side at the moment. The British Government were not prepared to have any parleying with the "rebel" Congress without unconditional surrender and a repudiation of its demand of "Quit India", which, as Gandhiji had said, was the very breath of his life. Even this step he could not have taken, even if he had wished it, without consultation with the Working Committee. But that door was kept firmly shut.

4

Lord Wavell in his correspondence with Gandhiji in detention, and also in his public utterances, had taken up the position that it needed "no consultation with anyone or anything but their own individual conscience for anyone of those under detention to decide whether he will withdraw from the 'Quit India' resolution".[13] But how could the withdrawal of a resolution arrived at jointly by hundreds of men and women

after much debating and careful consideration, be a matter of individual conscience? Gandhiji asked. "A resolution jointly undertaken," he wrote back to the Viceroy, "can be honourably, conscientiously and properly withdrawn only after joint discussion and deliberation. Individual conscience may come into play after this necessary step, not before. Is a prisoner ever free to exercise his conscience?"[14]

There was something Gilbertian in the soldier-Viceroy expounding the ethics of conscience to Gandhiji. Later he cavalierly dismissed vital constitutional issues, saying he was a soldier and he did not understand law.[15] He would have done well to leave alone ethics as well.

Since the British Government would not let the Congress Working Committee out of prison and the Viceroy would not allow anyone to meet them in prison, could not Gandhiji, to "find the key to Ahmednagar Fort", it was put to him, as the leader of the movement contemplated under the "Quit India" resolution, by virtue of the sole authority vested in him for the conduct of that movement, declare that the movement had been put into cold storage for good? Gandhiji had withdrawn civil disobedience in 1922, even before the ink of his letter of ultimatum to the Viceroy had dried, and when victory seemed to many to be within sight, because his "inner voice" demanded it. But he was not prepared to abate an iota from the "Quit India" demand, and compromise the faith of those thousands upon thousands who had taken the "Do or Die" pledge under his inspiration and lead, simply because the odds seemed to be going against them heavily. Not even a moderate leader like Shri Srinivas Sastry had asked for the withdrawal of the "Quit India" resolution, nor had Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, the eminent jurist. Dr. Jayakar, another legal luminary, had even expressed himself against the withdrawal on the ground of national self-respect. Of course they differed in regard to the sanction. But apart from it, there was a constitutional difficulty. On previous occasions, Gandhiji, as the leader of the contemplated civil disobedience campaign, had been vested with the power to name a successor. In the "Quit India" resolution, this had specifically been ruled out. After the leaders' arrest everybody was to be his or her own leader, free to implement the "Do or Die" pledge according to his or her own judgment, within the strict limits of truth and non-violence, of course. It was, therefore, a question whether from a strictly legal point of view his leadership of the movement contemplated under the August resolution had not lapsed with his incarceration. Advocate Bhulabhai Desai, who held the contrary opinion to begin with, after a discussion with Gandhiji, and after sleeping over it for a night, revised his original opinion and came definitely round to Gandhiji's. Other jurists, equally eminent, supported that interpretation.

There was a third alternative, viz., to come to terms with the Muslim League and present a united national demand to the British Government. Gandhiji had even from his incarceration invited Jinnah to

negotiate a settlement between the Muslim League and the Congress. He was prepared to try again, but he was firm in his view that there could be no conceding beforehand of an undefined Pakistan, or a Pakistan so defined as to involve certain danger to the integrity and safety of India. Subject to this proviso he ruled out no reasonable proposal for the safeguarding of the religious, cultural or economic integrity of the communities in a just solution of the communal problem. But would Jinnah be prepared to discuss a settlement on that basis? There was little hope.

"They (the Government) want to humiliate us," Gandhiji told a group of leading Indian industrialists: J.R.D. Tata, Purushottamdas Thakurdas and G.D. Birla. One of their compeers, Sir Ardeshir Dalal, had been invited to join the Viceroy's Executive Council. They wanted to know Gandhiji's reaction.

"If you ask me," replied Gandhiji, "I shall say, 'No'. Some little good he will certainly be able to do, but it will be at the sacrifice of greater good."

"If he does not go there," pleaded the business magnates, "there is danger that in economic matters the Government will be able to have altogether its own way to the detriment of the interests of India."

"Every good man who cooperates with the Government adds to its prestige, and thus prolongs the agony," was Gandhiji's uncompromising reply. "Lord Wavell may be—probably he is—a good man, but the system he represents is evil."

He was clear, there could be no cooperation with the Government in anything, not even in the food question, on their terms. "It must be on our terms, which implies real transfer of power to the people's elected representatives. Otherwise we shall be said to have sold ourselves for a mess of pottage. Therefore, even if I am alone, I shall say, 'No'."

They must not allow themselves to be dismayed, he told the industrialist friends, because the outlook, for the time being, looked dark, but share his faith that all was well with India because justice and truth were on her side and her means were pure. "I expect you to prime me and give me heart—not expect me to ease the situation by a counsel of weakness."

5

The stalemate was complete. A massive, granite wall stood on all sides without any opening. There was the general without his army; his lieutenants, who were his hands and feet, in prison; his own health shattered, and the opponent as determined as ever to give no quarter. He had often said that in Satyagraha there is no failure.

He lost no time in making it clear that the lapsing of his authority under the "Quit India" resolution had nothing to do with the normal activities of the Congress. "What no-one can do in the name of the

Congress is mass civil disobedience, which was never started and which, as I have said, I cannot at the present moment, even in my personal capacity, start. But if the Government interferes with the normal activities of the Congress, the inherited right of individual resistance to evil is in no way suspended."[16]

Many of those who were being discharged from prison were being served with various restriction orders confining them within certain areas or requiring them to report themselves periodically at police stations. What were they to do? Gandhiji told them that he regarded all such restrictions as degrading and could not himself submit to them. But he knew men who being unable any longer to bear jail hardships had preferred the restricted freedom. "I must refuse to judge their conduct," he said. "Everyone suffers according to his capacity. But it is a serious question for the Government to consider whether it is a necessary part of war effort to wound the spirit of young men and women whose only fault is that they love their country's independence before everything else."

And then by one of those inspired utterances of his which had more than once in the past made the words "defeat" and "disaster" lose their meaning and turned the tide of events, he shattered whatever cobwebs of doubt, depression or gloom had accumulated in the workers' minds. Addressing a gathering of the workers from Maharashtra, in what was his first public address after his release, he made a declaration of his own faith:

I can endorse nothing untruthful or violent. But I refuse to sit in judgment upon the actions of others. Nor is it of any avail at this moment . . . to weigh individual or collective acts of Congressmen and others in the scales of non-violence and truth. Suffice it to say that experience has led me to the unshakable conviction that our success has been mathematically proportionate to the extent to which we have adhered to truth and non-violence . . . . The phenomenal awakening of the masses during the last 25 years has been entirely due to the purity of our means. And to the extent that untruth and violence have crept in, they have hindered our progress.[17]

He had condemned such things in the past with an energy which sometimes surprised people. But during his two years of detention, he later explained, he had become wiser. The molehill of popular violence had been shown on behalf of the Government to have been a mountain, and the Himalayan violence of the authorities had been generally defended as being no more than necessary for the occasion. The people had at least cause for what they did; the Government had none. He could not, therefore, judge popular action by the footrule of truth and non-violence, he said, unless he could apply the same measure to Government action.[18]

Your faith in me overwhelms me . . . . I am doubtful whether I deserve all this confidence. But this much I know, that whatever strength I may have is entirely due to the fact that I am a votary of truth and non-violence. Some

friends have told me that truth and non-violence have no place in politics and worldly affairs. I do not agree. I have no use for them as a means of individual salvation. Their introduction and application in everyday life has been my experiment all along.[19]

He made it clear that his accidental release did not restore to him the authority which had been vested in him by the resolution of August, 1942, and which, according to his interpretation of that resolution, had lapsed with his imprisonment. What he might say to them was, therefore, to be regarded as an individual opinion to be accepted or rejected at will. "It would have been otherwise if I were speaking in a representative character. Then I would have expected you as disciplined soldiers to carry out my instructions."

He was not even a four-anna member of the Congress, he proceeded. But as he had often said before, everyone who followed the Congress policy was a Congressman whether he was on the Congress register or not. "The Congress should be a poor organisation if it depended for its strength on a few lakhs of members whose names appeared on Congress rolls. The great strength of the Congress is derived from the fact that it is broad-based upon the goodwill and cooperation, at critical moments, of the dumb millions."

What was his and their duty in the circumstances?

What each one of us should do at the present moment is of the utmost importance. Even if I thought that there was an opportunity for offering civil resistance at the present moment, I could not act in the name of the Congress. But remember the concluding golden lines of the August resolution. On the arrest of the principal Congressmen on the 9th day of August, 1942, every Congressman became his own leader competent to act as he liked, provided that his action fell within the limits prescribed by truth and non-violence. . . . I, therefore, fail to see what cause there can be for frustration. Is it merely because we did not reach our goal within the period hoped for?. . . It is given to man to make the effort even in the face of the heaviest odds. Success depends upon God's will or, if you like, upon many circumstances outside our control. There would be cause for frustration if we lost faith in ourselves, our means or our cause. There is no such word as frustration in the dictionary of Satyagraha. I have no answer for those who never had faith or who have lost faith in the efficacy of their weapon.

We must admit that forces of evil hem us in on all sides. They were never so strongly entrenched as they appeared to be at present. But that is no warrant for pessimism or despair. We have got the golden method of non-violent non-cooperation with evil. If we do not appear to have succeeded, the cause lies in ourselves. *If several component parts of the nation do not believe in the virtue of non-cooperation, the responsibility of those who believe in it becomes all the heavier.* We may have to strive long, the burden to carry may be heavy. But I can say from experience that it is never too heavy. What burden can be too heavy for a man

or woman who has risked all for the cause?...At no moment have I suffered from any sense of frustration. *Frustration is born of our own weaknesses and loss of faith. So long as we do not lose faith in ourselves, it is well with India.*

He then went on to survey the starvation and misery prevailing in the country. What was the root cause of this all-India starvation? "Under cover of war conditions, starving millions are being further starved. Startling as the figures that come from Bengal, Karnatak and other parts are, the distress is much deeper. None but a representative National Government can cope with it. I am of the opinion that if there was a war, we would have dealt with it much more effectively than at present. . . . There are said to be 700,000 villages in India. Some of them have simply been wiped out. No-one has any record of these. Thousands have died of starvation and disease in Bengal, Karnatak and elsewhere. . . . I know village economics. I tell you that the pressure from the top crushes those at the bottom. All that is necessary is to get off their backs."

How was that to be done? The reply again was non-cooperation. "Non-violence is a mighty weapon," he concluded. "In action it takes the form of civil disobedience and non-cooperation. Civil disobedience is a very potent weapon. But everyone cannot wield it. For that one needs training and inner strength. It requires occasions for its use. But non-violent non-cooperation can be practised by everybody. . . . Those who understand the secret of non-cooperation will find a ready answer for all their difficulties. We must learn resolutely to say 'No' when it becomes a duty. The hunt for wealth or fame is not for the non-cooperator."

6

"If after your convalescence and on further reflection you have a definite and constructive policy to propose for the furtherance of India's welfare, I shall be glad to consider it." Thus concluded Lord Wavell's letter to Gandhiji refusing him permission to see the Working Committee members in prison.

But the convalescence was complicated by the fact that the doctors were not sure whether he would be able to stand full treatment for hookworm till he had mustered up more strength. After a month at Juhu, therefore, they took him to Panchgani, a hill station near Poona.

At this point there appeared a British journalist on the scene—Mr. Stuart Gelder of the *News Chronicle*, London. The President of the *News Chronicle*, Lord Layton, was anxious to help in solving the Indian political deadlock. Under instructions from the Foreign Editor of the *News Chronicle*, Mr. Gelder, who had an assignment at that time on the Burma front, sought an interview with Gandhiji. Gandhiji agreed to see him on the understanding that whatever he might say to him would

primarily be meant to be brought to the attention of the Viceroy, and not for immediate publication.

"How would you begin your talk if you saw Lord Wavell?" asked Mr. Gelder, opening his interview.

Gandhiji replied that he would tell the Viceroy that he had sought the interview with the Working Committee with a view to help and not to hinder the Allied cause. He felt, he said, he had no authority to act in the name of the Congress. According to the canons of Satyagraha, when a civil resister was imprisoned, the authority vested in him automatically came to an end. It was not revived with his release. Hence the need for him to see the members of the Working Committee.

Mr. Gelder: "The Viceroy and everybody else is interested to know your mind, because of your hold on the masses of India."

Gandhiji: "I am a democrat and I cannot exploit that hold except through the organisation in building which I had a hand."

Mr. Gelder, however, feared that the Viceroy might feel that as Gandhiji swore by the "Quit India" resolution, and by the weapon of civil disobedience, his meeting the Working Committee members might only result in their reinvesting him (Gandhiji) with the authority to carry on civil disobedience in the name of the Congress. "The result will be that when you come out of the interview you will hold the pistol at the Viceroy's head and say, 'Do this or I start civil disobedience'. That would make things worse than they are today."

"At the back of that way of thinking," replied Gandhiji, "is the utter distrust of my profession that I am, and have always been, a friend of the British. Therefore I could never use the weapon of civil disobedience during the war unless there was a very grave reason, as for instance, the thwarting of India's natural right to freedom."

"Supposing the Working Committee was let out of the jail tomorrow, and the Government refused to give India what they wanted, would you start civil disobedience?"

"I have no intention of offering civil disobedience today. I cannot take the country back to 1942. History cannot repeat itself. The world has moved on during the last two years. The whole situation has to be reviewed *de novo*. The point therefore for me to discuss with the Working Committee is to know how they react to the knowledge that I have gained since my release."

Even without the authority of the Congress, proceeded Gandhiji, if he wanted to do it, he could start civil disobedience any day on the strength of his supposed influence with the masses. But if he did that it would only be to embarrass the British Government. This could never be his object. "But the Working Committee could not sit still while the people are suffering. It is my conviction that we cannot improve the food situation and alleviate the suffering of the people unless the power and responsibility are transferred from the British into Indian hands. Without

such a transfer the attempts of Congressmen and others to alleviate the people's sufferings are most likely to lead to conflicts with the Government."

"With things as they are," remarked Mr. Gelder, "I cannot believe that the British Government will transfer authority now. The Government will never concede the demand for independence while the war is on."

Gandhiji explained that he would be satisfied with a *National Government in full control of civil administration for the duration of the war.* It was not so in 1942 when the imminence of the Japanese invasion and the proposed British withdrawal in face of it were the ruling consideration. "Such a Government would be *composed of persons chosen by the elected members of the Central Assembly.* This would mean declaration of independence of India qualified as above during the war."

Mr. Gelder felt that this was a great advance on the 1942 position. He asked whether the military would control the railways, ports, etc. Gandhiji replied that the National Government would let the military have all facilities that they might require. "But the control would be that of the National Government. Ordinance rule would give place to normal administration by the National Government."

"Would the Viceroy be there?"

"Yes, but he will, like the King of England, be guided by the responsible Ministers. Popular Governments will be automatically restored in all the Provinces, so that both the Provincial and Central Governments will be responsible to the people of India." So far as military operations were concerned, he went on to explain, the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief would have complete control. But it must be possible for the National Government to offer advice and criticism even in military matters. "Thus the portfolio of Defence would be in the hands of the National Government which would be genuinely interested in the defence of the country and might render great assistance in the shaping of policies." The Allied forces would be allowed to carry on their operations on Indian soil. "I realise that they cannot defeat Japan without that. But the expenses of the Allied operations on Indian soil should not be borne by India."

"If a National Government is formed, would you advise the Congress to participate in it?"

"Yes."

"So it means that if a National Government is formed, the Congress will join and help the war effort. What would be your position then?"

"I am a lover of peace through and through," replied Gandhiji. "After independence was assured, I would probably cease to function as adviser to the Congress. As an all-war resister I would have to stand aside, but I shall not offer any resistance against the National Government or the Congress. My cooperation will be abstention from interfering with

the even tenor of life in India. I shall work in the hope that my influence will always be felt to keep India peace-minded and thereby to affect the world policy towards real peace and brotherhood among all without distinction of race and colour."

"Supposing there was conflict between the civil and military authority," Mr. Gelder next asked, "how would the dispute be settled?" If, for example, the civil authorities wanted to use a railway to carry two thousand tons of food and the military authorities wanted it for carrying ammunition, what would be his advice?

Gandhiji replied that he could conceive the necessity of allowing precedence to the military. "But supposing the military wanted to blow up places or practise manœuvres in disregard of the lives of the people, I would say, 'Hands off'." What was needed was mutual trust. With mutual trust such difficulties would not arise, and if they did, they would be easily adjusted. "If there is no trust it cannot work. I cannot work for Allied victory without trust."

If the British meant well, Gandhiji concluded, there would be no difficulty. "But most of us believe that whatever the Viceroy may wish personally, he has no authority in the political sphere. Mr. Churchill does not want a settlement. He wants to crush me. He has never denied the report. The beauty of it for me, the pity of it for him, is that no-one can crush a Satyagrahi. For he offers the body as a willing sacrifice and thus makes the spirit free."

* * *

Having rightly sensed that what was queering the pitch of Indo-British relations was distrust—distrust of the Congress, distrust of Indian independence, and almost allergic distrust of him, his non-violence and the "Quit India" demand, Gandhiji began to mobilise all the resources of fairness and goodwill to overcome that distrust. This took the form of presenting his cards for examination again and again to the whole world through a series of Press interviews, as a Satyagrahi is bound to do. The only authority which he claimed for his views, he explained, was as the representative of Satyagraha who loved India and had pledged himself and the nation to "Do or Die" for independence *as a part of the battle for democracy for which war was being professed to be fought.* Therefore, the "Quit India" cry could not be inimical to the Allied war effort. He was, therefore, at a loss to understand why there should be an insistence on the withdrawal of the "Quit India" resolution as a preliminary to a settlement of the Indian political issue.

"The August resolution is a noble declaration of which I am proud. I hope Congress will never supersede it," he cabled in answer to questions addressed to him by the *News Chronicle*, London. "The clause relating to sanction has caused offence. I have said it was never put into operation by me[20] and at this stage I cannot do so even if my power is revived after my discharge."[21]

"If my proposal reaches full fruition," he explained in another Press statement, "what is today a war of brute strength would be turned into a war for the liberation of the exploited peoples of the world. Then it would be a war between predominantly moral strength plus minimum of brute strength matched against pure brute strength which is being used for the exploitation of China and the weaker States of Europe."[22]

A clear acceptance of the Indian demand for independence (qualified during the pendency of the war) would immediately change the character of the Allied cause, he explained to a representative of the London *Daily Worker*. "It will immediately be differentiated from the cause of the Axis Powers, if the latters' fight can be described as a cause."[23]

"But apart from the moral gain what material gain could the Allies expect to accrue from the recognition of India as an independent country as envisaged in your proposal?" the correspondent asked. Gandhiji replied that if the character of the Allied cause was so radically altered by the acceptance of his offer, all the rest must follow as a matter of course. "But whether it does or not, I want the acceptance of my offer to be on the unadulterated moral basis. It should be enough for the Allies to have the guarantee that their military operations will not in any way be adversely affected by India being counted as an independent nation. . . . I hold that the effect of the declaration of India's independence accompanied by simultaneous sincere action should by itself take the wind out of the sails of the Axis Powers. And I should be surprised if they do not capitulate almost immediately on the declaration."

While the British Government had denounced civil disobedience contemplated under the "Quit India" resolution as a mask for violence calculated to sabotage the Allied war effort, a section of the Tory Press now branded Gandhiji's declaration about the non-resumption of the civil disobedience as "insincere", as Gandhiji was a "confirmed war resister". His profession of sympathy with Allied war effort could not be sincere, it was argued, since furtherance of war effort was inconsistent with his basic creed of non-violence!

This was like a vignette from the Aesop's Fables, when no matter what you did, it displeased somebody. Furtherance of the war effort in terms of his offer, Gandhiji showed, was not only not inconsistent with his "basic creed of non-violence" but a natural corollary to it in terms of the total abolition of war. "If I became a party to the August resolution and if I have now suggested what I consider to be a perfectly honourable solution, it is because thereby I expect to promote war-resistance effort. I dream of a world where there would be no strife between nations and nations. This is possible only if Great Britain, America and Russia contemplate such world peace. . . . I see no chance for the groaning world unless these three States demonstrate to the world that . . . they are not putting forth the effort they are doing for any selfish design, but they

are truly fighting for all democracies on the face of the earth. My proposal is, therefore, the acid test. . . ."[24]

If he had his way, he cabled in answer to a question by the British news magazine, *Cavalcade*, "the post-war policy of the free National Government of India would be to promote commonwealth of all world States including, if possible, belligerent States also, so as to reduce to the minimum the possibility of an armed conflict between different States."[25] His proposal was not inspired by his concern only for the sufferings of the people of India but for those whether engaged in war or not of the whole world: "I cannot look at this butchery going on in the world with indifference. I have unchangeable faith that it is beneath the dignity of man to resort to mutual slaughter. . . . I should be never reconciled with myself if for fear of hostile criticism or wrath of impatient Congressmen or even possible displeasure of the members of the Working Committee, I did not express my personal opinion, the acceptance of which, I hold, must result in bringing peace to the world, even out of the present turmoil."[26]

Finally, it was put to him that Jinnah might take exception to it, if his demand was conceded, on the ground that a National Government could help to consolidate the position of the "Hindus and the Congress". If Jinnah took that stand, or if the Government turned down his demand, replied Gandhiji, it would only show that neither of them wanted India to be really free at that juncture or to give India a full share in winning the war for freedom and democracy. "I myself feel firmly that Mr. Jinnah does not block the way, but the British Government do not want a just settlement of the Indian claims for independence which is overdue, and they are using Mr. Jinnah as a cloak for denying freedom to India. . . . It is the duty of all fair-minded people to break this diabolical conspiracy to stifle India's aspiration."[27]

Those who had seen in his repudiation of the Cripps offer of 1942, and sponsoring of the "Quit India" resolution, a desire to take advantage of the Allied reverses, now attributed his offer to Wavell through the Gelder interview to the "heavy Congress defeat". Some others criticised it on the score that his terms were "high-pitched", whereas, according to all laws of conventional warfare, the defeated party is entitled only to a dictated peace. Both these inferences were equally unwarranted and betrayed a fundamental ignorance of the strategy and tactics that govern a Satyagraha fight. A Satyagrahi never seeks to take advantage of the opponent's weakness, nor does he strike his colours because the tide seems to be running against him. He bases his fight on a fundamentally irreducible minimum which is also his maximum even after the most resounding victory. Gandhiji had rejected the Cripps offer in 1942 because, in the first place, it was a post-war plan, concerned more with the future than with the present arrangements and, secondly, because it contemplated "almost perpetual vivisection of India" which would have erected "effective barriers against Indian independence".[28] And thirdly, because under

that plan Indian States would have been set up "as an all-extensive disintegrating factor".[29]

Gandhiji's offer to Lord Wavell was only a restatement *mutatis mutandis* of the "Quit India" demand of 1942, in the changed circumstances of 1944. In 1942, direct action was a necessity because the British Government had shown itself to be interested mainly in draining India of its material resources and its resources in man-power, while it was preparing to allow large parts of the country to be overrun by the Japanese,[30] and it was necessary to resort to civil disobedience of the most thorough and extensive type, with all the attendant risks, to force it to free India to defend itself and to enthuse the people to give their best to the winning of the war for democracy. As Father Lash (later Bishop of Bombay) put it, it was like "a caged elephant trying to break itself free before an advancing fire, which his keeper was unable to control". In 1944, civil disobedience was not a necessity, as it was in 1942, nor was it practicable with the spectre of famine stalking the land and the people's mistakes in the practice of non-violence staring them in the face. What Gandhiji did in July, 1944, in effect was to take up the thread where it had been broken by the Government's precipitate action in 1942. The "Quit India" demand remained unchanged; the form and the method of its presentation and enforcement were changed in keeping with the changed circumstances.

The "favourable war situation" and the "heavy defeat of the Congress" had nothing to do with his "revised attitude", as his latest offer to Lord Wavell was characterised, for the simple reason that "in the flush of approaching victory my proposal was not likely even to receive a hearing".[31] As for the "heavy defeat of the Congress" he did not feel it at all. "I have not a shadow of a doubt that this passage through the fire of suffering by thousands of Congressmen and Congress sympathisers has raised the status of India and the strength of the people. . . . Victory, that is independence of India, is a certainty."[32]

Since reason and persuasion—as against brute force, which is the negation of reason—are the very base and fulcrum of Satyagraha, and since a Satyagrahi's demand must not only be feasible and just, but should be recognised as such by the opponent as well, a Satyagrahi has need to have an intellect razor-keen, thinking crystal-clear, and judgment mellowed by ceaseless self-introspection and that quality of fairness, tolerance and sympathy which is the key to right understanding of the opponent's viewpoint. Intuition purified by the penance of truth leads the way, but the resolution of the conflict comes through the process of "integration" for which it prepares the way. "Integration is arrived at by first analysing the expressed desires of the opponents into their elements and more fundamental meanings", and then "inventing and working out a wholly new solution, perhaps involving very different activities, which satisfies all or most of the fundamental desires and needs of both parties

in a situation, and utilises freely and fully the energies of both without balking or suppression".[33] Once the flaw in the opponent's reasoning is brought home to him and made sun-clear, he has no more legs to stand upon, and his conversion must follow in due course, unless the Satyagrahi himself gives it a new lease of life by his own weaknesses and mistakes. In the course of a few weeks after coming out of prison, Gandhiji had accomplished the first part of the job by his sledge-hammer utterances and statements to the Press. The Communist representative of the London *Daily Worker*, who with the rest of his party had been opposed to the "Quit India" struggle, and therefore to Gandhiji, cabled to his paper: "Gandhi is genuinely anxious both for India's sake and the sake of United Nations that a speedy settlement of the Indian problem should be achieved. . . . There is no doubt that from Gandhi's side, every effort will be made to see that the present deadlock, with all its consequences—famine, food crisis, and a reluctant people—is ended as soon as possible. It is for the British people to see that their Government does not stand by Amery's blank negative statements but really takes a positive step towards ending the deadlock and ensuring a quick ending of the war in Asia."[34]

7

Drawing Lord Wavell's attention to his (Gandhiji's) interview with Gelder, to which Gelder had given premature publicity, Gandhiji wrote to the Viceroy: "The publication will nevertheless be a blessing in disguise if the interview enables you to grant at least one of my earlier requests"[35] viz. allowing him to see the Working Committee members. But knowing as he did that it was not Lord Wavell but Mr. Churchill who was the man to decide the issue, Gandhiji wrote a letter at the same time to the British Prime Minister:

"Dilkusha"
Panchgani
17th July, 1944.

Dear Prime Minister,

You are reported to have the desire to crush the "naked fakir", as you are said to have described me. I have been long trying to be a fakir and that naked—a more difficult task. I, therefore, regard the expression as a compliment though unintended. I approach you then as such and ask you to trust and use me for the sake of your people and mine and through them those of the world.

Your sincere friend,
M. K. Gandhi

Rajaji was against sending this letter to Churchill. "I am afraid, your letter will be misunderstood," he argued. "It is a naughty letter."

Gandhiji: "I don't think so. I meant it seriously."

Rajaji: "You have touched him on the raw by rubbing in a past utterance of his, of which he is probably not very proud."

Gandhiji: "I have taken out the sting by appropriating his remark as an unintended compliment."

Rajaji: "I hope you are right."

Gandhiji: "I am sorry but I think you are wrong!"

This letter to the British Prime Minister miscarried. It was the first instance in Gandhiji's experience of an important letter of his failing to reach its destination. A copy was, therefore, sent to Mr. Churchill two months later. The only reply it fetched was an acknowledgment with thanks through the Viceroy! It was quite clear, as Gandhiji had said to Mr. Gelder, that Mr. Churchill did not want a settlement, and, therefore, was not prepared to use the Mahatma either for the good of the people of India or his own.

Lord Wavell replied to Gandhiji that the Gelder interview was not enough for his purpose. He could not usefully comment upon it. He, however, reiterated what he had written to Gandhiji before, that if he (Gandhiji) would submit to him any definite and constructive policy, he would be glad to consider it. Apparently, there was nothing constructive, in the Viceroy's opinion, either in Gandhiji's asking for permission to meet the Working Committee members for exploring avenues for a settlement or in the basis of a settlement which he had propounded through Mr. Gelder.

"I think it unlikely," observed Mr. Brailsford, "that any fresh attempt to reach a settlement will be made by the British Government, until the war is over. I assume with even greater confidence that no attempt by Indians can succeed, or will be encouraged, so long as their trusted leaders are in prison and Congress remain in revolt. The realists of Whitehall and New Delhi may reckon that when the war is won, our prestige and authority will have been recovered; while available military resources will be unlimited and our dependence on American goodwill will no longer hamper us. In short, we may then be able to deal with the Indians as Empires are wont to deal with subject peoples."[36]

"I must admit my disappointment over your letter," wrote back Gandhiji to Lord Wavell. "But I am used to work in the face of disappointment." And with that, he sent the following "concrete proposal":

> I am prepared to advise the Working Committee to declare that in view of changed conditions mass Civil Disobedience envisaged by the resolution of August, 1942, cannot be offered and that full cooperation in the war effort should be given by the Congress if a declaration of immediate Indian Independence is made and a National Government responsible to the Central Assembly be formed subject to the proviso that during the pendency of the war, the military operations should continue, as at present but without involving any financial burden on India.[37]

Gandhiji concluded: "I shall continue to knock so long as there is the least hope of an honourable settlement."

But the fact was that there was no will on the part of the British Government at this stage to come to any "honourable settlement", and, therefore, there was naturally no way either. After dwelling at length on "their duty to safeguard the interests of the racial and religious minorities and of the depressed classes, and their treaty obligations to the Indian States" which came in the way of acceding to Gandhiji's demand, and which in themselves were enough excuse for ruling out any move on the part of the British Government, and after reminding Gandhiji that the British offer of unqualified freedom *after* the cessation of hostilities, which was made in the Cripps offer, was "conditional upon the framing of a constitution agreed by the *main elements* (italics mine) of India's national life", and also after most piously reiterating that "His Majesty's Government remain most anxious that a settlement of the Indian problem should be reached" in a way in which no settlement can ever be reached, the Viceroy's letter proceeded: "But proposals such as those put forward by you are quite unacceptable to His Majesty's Government as a basis of discussion. . . . They are indeed very similar to the proposals made by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad to Sir Stafford Cripps in April, 1942, and His Majesty's Government's reasons for rejecting them (Gandhiji's present proposals)are the same as they were then."[38]

The reply was Wavell's but the voice was Churchill's.

In November, 1942, when the fortunes of war were going against the Allies, with the Japanese army knocking at India's door and the *Wehrmacht* still going strong, Churchill had declared that he had not become the King's First Minister in order to preside at the liquidation of the British Empire. Much less could he be inclined for it in the middle of 1944, when the tide had definitely turned in favour of the Allies and the German armies were on the retreat on all fronts.

Commented Gandhiji on the Viceroy's reply: "Boiled down, the Viceroy's proposition means that unless all the main parties agree as to the constitution of the future, and there is agreement between the British Government and the main parties, there is to be no change in the constitutional position, and the Government of India as at present is to be carried on. The names of the parties given in the Government reply are illustrative only. I have no doubt that, on due occasions, more will be exhibited as from a conjurer's bag and who knows how and when the British Government will agree to surrender control. It is as clear as crystal that the British Government do not propose to give up the power they possess over the 400 millions, unless the latter develop strength enough to wrest it from them. I shall never lose hope that India will do so by purely moral means."[39]

CHAPTER III

THE NATION'S VOICE

1

THE ROAD to freedom promised to be hard and long. An arduous journey lay ahead. The Mahatma set about to refurbish his arsenal of non-violence.

During the "Quit India" struggle, many Congressmen had lost their moorings. The August resolution had put upon each worker the burden of implementing the "Quit India" resolution according to his or her own judgment while keeping within the four corners of truth and non-violence. But as a result of the imprisonment of the leaders at one fell swoop, different people had interpreted non-violence differently. Thanks to a broadcast by Mr. Amery, the Secretary of State for India, immediately after the Congress leaders' arrest in August 1942, in which he had enumerated varieties of "sabotage", which, according to him, were "included in the Congress programme", even an incorrigible stickler for non-violence like Kishorlal Mashruwala, who, to use the language of the Mahatma himself, carried his logic of non-violence some times to "embarrassing lengths", was misled.[1]

It was claimed on behalf of those engaged in sabotage activity that they had conscientiously striven to avoid personal injury to anyone in carrying out their programmes. But secrecy had become the order of the day. It was mostly confined to the preparatory and organisational part of the programme of open defiance. Defence in British law courts and avoidance of penalty were categorically ruled out. An all-India Satyagraha Council with corresponding organisations for the Provinces had been set up. As the onslaught of governmental repression gathered volume and intensity, more and more workers went underground. Some had grave charges of violence pending against them; in the case of others prizes had been announced for their capture.

Some of these friends wanted to meet Gandhiji soon after his release. He sent them word that they could come at their risk. Several of them accordingly came and saw him at Juhu and later at Panchgani. They included R. R. Diwakar, who later became a Minister in the Central Cabinet of the Indian Union and then the Governor of Bihar, Annada Chowdhury, a veteran constructive worker from Bengal, the Socialist leader Achyut Patwardhan, and Aruna Asaf Ali, the wife of Asaf Ali, member of the Congress Working Committee and later Indian

Ambassador in the United States under the Interim National Government. Aruna—that intrepid lady—had by her courage and resourcefulness won the admiration of many Government servants and tacit support of even some police officials. An Englishman, who was also a Government servant, meeting her accidentally at the house of a friend, after hearing from her the story of her adventures, instead of informing the police, complimented her for her courage saying he himself would have done the same thing in similar circumstances. A big prize had been announced by the authorities for her capture.

Gandhiji's advice to them was emphatic. He held all secrecy to be sin. "To the extent to which secrecy has crept in it has hurt our cause. We have not to think in terms of one or two, we have to think in terms of forty crores. Today they feel lifeless. We cannot revive them by resorting to secret methods. Only by adhering to Truth and Non-violence can we bring back lustre to their lustreless eyes."

Looking at their immediate surroundings, he said to them, they might feel that if some of them had not gone underground, the movement would have suffered. But this was only apparently so. "When you come to bigger issues, you will find that it is only by eschewing all secrecy and working openly that you can advance."

His advice to all those who were in hiding, therefore, was that they should discover themselves: "If you share my conviction that underground activity is not conducive to the growth of the spirit of active non-violence, you will discover yourselves and take the risk of being imprisoned, believing that imprisonment thus undergone itself helps the freedom movement."[2] Thus only would they be able to build invincible power. "Today you may be two, tomorrow you will be twenty if you come out in open, and so the struggle will go on gathering momentum from day to day."

In a letter to one of them he wrote: "Secrecy, in my opinion, is a sin and a symptom of violence, therefore, definitely to be avoided, especially if the freedom of dumb millions is the goal. Hence all underground activity, in my opinion, is taboo."[3]

Some of them had also been forced to the same conclusion as a result of their experience of underground work. Reported Diwakar to Gandhiji: "Possibly my trying to remain out influenced me in not trying to dissuade workers from evading arrest after they had done some action. It became a part of the technique of dislocation activities to go on doing things without being arrested." While some of the "wanted" persons moved about freely, others absconded and went into hiding. Some took aliases. Some others gave up their customary dress and went about disguised. Nor were they able to keep out altogether petty bickerings, rivalries, cliques and sordid intrigues common to all secret organisations. "Our ranks were naturally thinning," reported another underground worker. "There was a limit to our carrying on and that had

practically been reached." When the civil authorities sent for military aid and military aid was sent, it was found that "that was the limit to which (our) resistance could go. Beyond that it could not".

Gandhiji was reluctant to issue any directive. To those who asked for "orders", he said: "I must be regarded as still a prisoner with freedom to give opinions, not to issue directives. I can say this, however, that if you walk with truth on one side and non-violence on the other, you cannot go wrong. This is the golden path and if you follow it, God will sustain you." They should do nothing, he added, that did not appeal to their heart. If his advice did not appeal to their heart, they should do what their heart dictated. "When there is a conflict between the head and the heart, the heart wins."

Aruna Asaf Ali had been suffering from acute dysentery. It had been accentuated by the vicissitudes of her underground life. To her Gandhiji wrote: "I have been filled with admiration for your courage and heroism. I have sent you messages that you must not die underground. You are reduced to a skeleton. Do come out and surrender yourself and win the prize offered for your arrest. Reserve the prize money for the Harijan cause."[4]

Had the sabotage activity then caused a setback in the struggle for independence? Had all the courage and heroism which the people had shown in the course of it been wasted? Gandhiji's verdict was that in the perspective of history the country would be found to have advanced towards freedom through every form of struggle, and that applied to their struggle as well. But the progress would have been much greater if all had remained non-violent. He elucidated his meaning by a concrete instance. He had the highest admiration for the courage, patriotism and the spirit of self-sacrifice of Jayaprakash Narayan, the Socialist leader, who had escaped from prison to lead the underground movement, and for whose capture a prize of ten thousand rupees had been announced by the authorities. But if he had to award a medal for true heroism, said Gandhiji, it would go not to Jayaprakash but to Prabhavati, his brave Satyagrahi wife, who had played the same role in her husband's life as Kasturba Gandhi had done in Gandhiji's, when she became, as he wrote after her death in one of his letters to Lord Wavell, his "teacher in the art and practice of non-violent non-cooperation"[5].

In a public statement he said:

> It has been suggested to me that without some workers going underground we could have done nothing....Examples of other nations as having not hesitated to do all these things and much worse have been cited. My reply is that no nation has, so far as I know, deliberately used truth and non-violence as exclusive means for the attainment of freedom. Judged by that standard ...underground activities, even though entirely innocent...should have no place in the technique of non-violence....Though these activities may be

shown to have touched the imagination of some people and aroused their enthusiasm...they have harmed the movement as a whole.[6]

"It is no secrecy if a person is boldly prepared to face the consequence of his action," argued the underground workers. But Gandhiji's objection to secrecy was fundamental. Its whole psychology and mode of action were different. Secrecy aimed at building a "wall of protection" round the individual who practised it. Ahimsa disdained such protection. It functioned in the open, even in the face of the heaviest odds. A people of 400 millions could not be organised for action by any other than open and truthful means. No secret organisation, however great, could have brought about the phenomenal awakening that had come among the teeming illiterate, poverty-stricken masses of India since the inauguration of the non-violent non-cooperation movement. He could understand making allowances for people's weakness in regard to secrecy but the ideal itself admitted of no watering down.

* * *

Two new schools of thought had emerged during the "Quit India" struggle. One of them, represented by a large number of Socialists, openly said that as a programme of action, Ahimsa was played out. It had done its work which was "to awaken the masses". In the "final struggle" for independence, of which the non-violent phase was the precursor, force of arms could not be wholly excluded. The other school professed belief in the principle of Ahimsa but contended that there was room for "modification" and "elaboration" of its technique. They called it "neo-Satyagraha" or "neo-Gandhism". This modified technique included sabotage on the widest scale, underground activity and organisation of a "parallel Government".

The British administration had been put out of action in several parts of the country during the "Quit India" struggle—in Balia district in U.P., in Midnapur in Bengal, in Satara in Bombay and in large parts of Bihar—and a parallel administration (known as *Jatiya Sarkar* in Midnapur and *Patri Sarkar* in Satara) set up. It organised education and welfare work, set up *panchayats*, settled disputes, punished "offenders" and "traitors"—sometimes with rough and ready justice—levied fines and raised taxes, not always by verbal persuasion, disarmed the British police, ordered "arrests" of local officials and Government servants, and organised "non-violent" flying columns for carrying out certain specified and unspecified tasks.

Those engaged in this work questioned whether destruction of Government property, i.e. railways, buildings, bridges, telegraph lines, etc., was violence. "They are the nation's property; one can do anything one likes with one's own property. It may be necessary to destroy them to arrest the course of governmental violence."

Gandhiji demurred. "Even under a National Government no individual has a right to destroy the nation's property because he is dissatisfied with the Government's conduct. Moreover the evil resides not in the buildings, communications, or roads, but those who make evil use of them. By destroying the former you leave the evil untouched. To sterilise it needs not destruction but self-immolation of the purest type, which would demonstrate that the authorities might break but would not be able to bend a will that has resigned itself to the God of truth."

They returned to the charge: "We agree that destruction of the bridges etc., does not touch the evil but only provokes a worse evil in the form of reprisals. We also agree that the evil is within ourselves; without it the evil outside would not be able to make any headway. But it may be necessary from a strategic point of view, for the success of the movement and in order to prevent demoralisation, to resort to secrecy."

To Gandhiji all that had a familiar ring. He had often heard that argument before in olden days in defence of terrorism. He showed to them that their new programme was in no way different from the old. People had realised the futility of physical violence but some people apparently thought they could practise it in its modified form as sabotage. It lacked the quality of non-violence and could not take the place of a full-fledged armed conflict. They might hold on to these symbols of authority, he told them, for a while; it might tickle their fancy, but they were no more than children's toys. "We have to deal with a power which takes pride in not recognising defeat. In the early part of the British rule there were powerful risings. In several places the British were actually beaten. But they won in the end." A British statesman used to say: "I do not believe in wooden guns." Gandhiji was at one with him there. National struggles could not be won by "wooden guns".

As against that, he asked them to consider the height of courage and fearlessness to which the whole mass of people had risen by following the technique of truth and non-violence which shuns all secrecy. "How it works we do not know. But the fact remains that under non-violence we have marched from strength to strength even through our apparent failures and setbacks, whereas terrorism has invariably resulted in demoralisation."

"You characterised the "Quit India" movement as a non-violent rebellion. Is not non-violent rebellion a programme of seizure of power?" they asked.

"No," replied Gandhiji. "A non-violent rebellion is not a programme of seizure of power. It is a programme of transformation of relationship ending in a peaceful transfer of power."

If the non-violent non-cooperation of the people is complete so that the governmental machinery is paralysed, he explained, or if a power vacuum results by the collapse of organised Government under the impact, for instance, of a foreign invasion, the people's organisation would

naturally step in and take over. But all that would presuppose such cohesion, unity of purpose and harmony among all sections of the people and control even over the anti-social elements that the people's Government would be able to enforce its fiats with no other sanction except that of non-violence. "It will never use coercion. Even those who hold contrary views will receive full protection under it."

But, those who had experienced the thrills of underground activity were not so easily to be weaned. They argued: "We grant sabotage and secrecy are violence. But we have found that a person who has had a schooling in our kind of activity comes nearer to true non-violence than one who had no such experience."

To this Gandhiji had a ready answer. What they said was true only in the sense that having tried violence again and again such a person might have realised its futility. He put a counter question: Would they also say that a person who had had a taste of vice was nearer to virtue than one who had not?

* * *

The publication of Gandhiji's views on the programme of sabotage, secrecy, etc., evoked a protest from a section of Congressmen. A woman worker said to Gandhiji: "You told us we should be our own leaders after your arrest. In the absence of the Working Committee everyone of us was to think for himself or herself. We acted according to our light. Your recent utterances make us feel that we have been let down."

"I have blamed no-one. But when a thing is wrong I must say so," Gandhiji replied.

"Will it not cause a setback?"

"No, we learn from our mistakes. By correcting them we advance."

"Some say, 'If this is your narrow interpretation of non-violence, we shall have none of it. Call it violence or by whatever name you like, we cannot dislodge the Government without sabotage.' "

"It cannot succeed though for some time it may seem to or even actually succeed. But I have said that those who do not believe in my way can say so openly, and courageously try their own method and see if they will succeed better."

"We admit that public opinion has veered round to your view. The public has come to feel, whether through enlightenment or fear, that sabotage won't do. But you cannot expect everyone to become a perfect being, which your method implies."

"I agree. That is why I launched forth with imperfect men. But whether the people develop the required non-violence or not I cannot play fast and loose with my principles."

"What is the quickest way to reach our goal?"

"The straightest way, though it may appear to be long."

"Then you do not visualise independence in the near future?"

"I visualise it in the nearest future, if my way is followed."

The worker persisted: "You want us to feel indignant and yet sit quiet?"

"No, I want you to feel very indignant with yourself. It is no use feeling angry with a snake, the snake will bite. Follow any way that commends itself to you if mine does not, but do not sit still."

"We have not the courage, we can't get on if we oppose you."

"You must develop that courage. . . . It is because of this courage to stand alone that I am supposed to represent India's urge for freedom. . . . Swaraj is not for the weak. If you say you follow me when you really do not, you are weak."

The woman worker was nonplussed. Gandhiji noticed her dilemma. Reassuringly he proceeded: "However, you can say, 'We do not follow your reasoning but we yield to your experience.' You can tell your co-workers, 'We went there. We were not convinced. But we could not convince him either. Therefore, we will follow him as disciplined soldiers.' But if this course does not appeal to them, it is equally open to them to say, 'The Mahatma has told us to follow our own reason if we have no faith in his way.' That will be equally honourable—perhaps more. I shall then defend them."

Appa Pant, the Rajkumar of Aundh, had been advising and guiding underground workers. He put before Gandhiji his dilemma: "With me truth and non-violence are not a policy but my creed. I know of underground workers who would not willingly hurt a fly. They are patriots to the core. I have to shelter them when they come to me and seek my advice. I want to wean them from secret methods. But in doing so I have myself to resort to secrecy. I feel puzzled and perplexed."

"Your attitude is unexceptional," replied Gandhiji. "You cannot jump out of a running train, as it were. No outside agency can give you effective guidance. It must come from within. If you dive within yourself and search prayerfully for an answer, a stage will come when suddenly your eyes will bé opened and you will conceive such a disgust for untruth and secrecy that you will go to the underground workers and tell them that they will find you useless as a guide if they want to go their way. They will then see it in your face and understand, and very likely it will be the beginning of a new chapter in their lives."

* * *

The upshot of all these discussions was that most of the Congressmen who were engaged in carrying on or directing underground activity in various parts of the country, came out into the open. Some surrendered themselves to the authorities while others courted imprisonment by offering civil disobedience openly.

An underground worker who was "wanted" by the police came to Sevagram Ashram to discover himself to Gandhiji. The police got wind of it. The Police Sub-Inspector came to me and demanded the note which he (the underground worker) had handed to Gandhiji. Gandhiji

scribbled out: "He (the wanted person) came and said he believed in me and my teachings and had decided to surrender himself. Hence the note he wrote. I must add that even if he had admitted his guilt to me I would be bound not to disclose it to the police. I could not be reformer and informer at the same time."[7]

Achyut Patwardhan and Aruna Asaf Ali could not reconcile themselves to the idea of surrendering to the British authorities. Achyut felt heart-broken. But like a loyal and disciplined soldier, out of deference to Gandhiji's "judgment", he decided to withdraw from underground activity. Aruna preferred to continue her outlaw career till the last. To her Gandhiji wrote:

> My whole heart goes out to you. I consider myself incapable of asking anybody much less you of doing anything that would hurt your pride. If you surrender yourself, you would do so to raise yourself and the country with you. The surrender won't be out of your weakness but out of your strength. This struggle has been full of romance and heroism. You are the central figure. I would love to see you since you are so near. . . . Lest you cannot, this is my advice. I do not want you to surrender unless you feel that it is the better course. I have brought myself to regard secrecy as a sin in the application of non-violence. But it cannot be followed mechanically. . . . You must therefore be the best judge of what is proper. And is that not the final message of the Congress in the closing sentence of the great resolution of 8th August, 1942?. . .God be your sole guide and do as He bids you. This I promise, I will not judge you no matter what you do.[8]

Both Achyut and Aruna came out in the open when the warrants against them were cancelled in the beginning of 1946.

Gandhiji was in an anomalous position. He was not technically in command and he had no desire to issue orders. But the workers said they did not want to reason for themselves; they wanted to be led. A general without an army, he had to lead without issuing any command, and reason out the implications of his faith, which was above reason, to those who did not trust to their own reason. "I do not want our people to lock up their reason," he said. "A wise parent allows the children to make mistakes. It is good for them once in a while to burn their fingers."

2

The Congress organisation lay sprawling on the ground after the savage mauling that it had received. Gandhiji began to nurse it back to strength and vigour by skilful ministration in which he was past master. His contacts with the workers had enabled him to take the exact bearings of the situation. "I cannot visualise a general mass movement today or in the near future," he told a group of women workers from Bengal. "The snake bites a few and its hiss frightens away many more. Similarly,

the Government has broken some and terrorised the bulk of the rest by its display of unlimited brute force."

Did it mean they would have to wait till after the war for an opportunity to launch a fresh struggle for freedom? Or should they go on continuing their resistance? he was asked.

"Resistance to a foreign Government cannot be relaxed for a single moment," he replied. "The way to it is through constructive work aided by individual civil disobedience, whenever there is scope for it. Civil disobedience is a very potent weapon. But everyone cannot wield it. For it one needs training and inner strength. It requires occasions for its use. But constructive work is always there for anybody who will take it up. *It is the drill of the non-violent soldier.* Through it you can make the villagers feel self-reliant, self-sufficient and free so that they can stand up for their rights. If you make a real success of the constructive programme, you will win Swaraj for India without civil disobedience."

The Congress was under a ban. Prohibitory orders were in force even against the informal assembling of more than five persons in some parts; at places even Khadi was taboo. How were they to proceed? the workers asked.

Gandhiji explained to them that although he had ruled out mass civil disobedience, prohibitory orders in respect of normal Congress activities were to be defied. "We should refuse to take notice of such orders and go on as if they were not there." For instance, supposing they took up the sanitation of the village of Sevagram and the Government prohibited it, they were not to give it up. "They should have to break your hand before they can snatch the broom-stick from it." Or, to take up another instance, what was there to prevent them from hoisting the national flag on their houses? If they had not done it, it was simply because they had lost the stamina to stand up for their self-respect. "I consider it the duty of every individual to fight for his or her natural rights. It is a duty that cannot be shirked."

"What about those who may have the wish but lack the strength to resist?"

"My advice to such is that they should take up constructive work as a means for developing the strength and pray for it."

"Suppose they imprison you, what plan of action would you suggest in that event for continuing our freedom battle to success?"

"Shed your inertia and get along with the work that I have outlined in right earnest."

One of the woman workers asked: "In our past struggles it was found that the leonine violence of the Government goaded the people into counter-violence. How can we cope with this problem?"

"That is the women's sphere," replied Gandhiji. "I have repeated times without number that non-violence is the inherent quality of women. For ages men have had training in violence. In order to become

non-violent they have to cultivate the qualities of women. Ever since I have taken to non-violence, I have become more and more of a woman myself." Women were used to making sacrifices for the family, he explained. They had now to learn to sacrifice for the country. "I invite all women, including the wives of millionaires to enlist in my non-violent army. The husbands can boast their millions, to it let them add the credit for the services rendered by their wives."

* * *

Famine, cyclone and Government repression had all combined to crush the spirit of the people of Bengal. The masses felt forsaken. Even in Midnapore, where the people had shown amazing heroism, they were feeling frustrated. Why should that be so? Gandhiji gave his analysis: Though they had shown the spirit of sacrifice to a very high degree, they had not developed that non-violence which knows no frustration. He was not talking, he said, of non-violence of his definition but political non-violence which the Congress had accepted as a policy. Even a policy demanded one's undivided allegiance, so long as it held. It was there that their practice had fallen short. "A soldier who is pledged to violence and sworn to kill as many of the enemy as possible will, at the commander's order, defend with his life prisoners of war placed in his custody. He will carry out the order in letter and in spirit. This is what the Congressmen have not done, and that is the reason for their frustration and demoralisation. They rendered obedience with mental reservations."

"Non-violence, you have told us," a worker said, "is a virtue of the highest order. As such it can be practised only by the highest. Should it be preached to those who have not gained moral courage and a loving attitude?"

"Non-violence as a creed can be practised by anyone who will follow the highest in faith. All do not see God face to face but many believe in God through faith."

"How can faith be attained if it is not there?" he was again asked.

"By making penance for it. Faith is the fruit of penance, i.e. sincere longing and striving in the pursuit of that longing."

"Do you notice any appreciable change in the hearts of the British rulers as a result of our struggle?" asked another worker.

"The change that I notice in our immediate rulers is for the worse," Gandhiji answered. "But there is a change for the better among the British people and the people of the world as a whole, and that I think is mainly due to Satyagraha."

The worker felt doubtful as to the second part of the statement. Gandhiji continued: "You must not run away with the idea that the technique of Satyagraha has failed. In South Africa just before the settlement, the language of General Smuts was not different from what the language of Linlithgow or Amery has been in recent times. The air was

thick with rumours as to the measures the Government contemplated in order to crush the Satyagraha movement and then suddenly there was an honourable settlement. Similarly here, too, unless the people go absolutely mad, conciliation is bound to come."

"Of course conciliation and settlement came at the end of the Boer war, too, though the struggle of the Boers was wholly violent," he proceeded after a pause. "But think of the price the Boers had to pay. If we had made even a fraction of the sacrifice that they made, in a purely non-violent way, our struggle would have come to a successful termination long ago. I can see freedom coming and that, too, not in the distant future but before our very eyes. . . . What we are witnessing today is the necessary darkness before dawn."

The friend agreed that the Satyagraha technique had great potency but it was by the boycott part of it that he swore. He was doubtful whether fasting, prayer, etc., the spiritual part of it, had any effect upon the head and heart of imperialism.

"I wonder how many people have practised that to convert the opponent," asked Gandhiji in return. "I am probably the solitary example. My faith in the efficacy of prayer is immovable, though I cannot give proof."

* * *

Some teachers from a couple of national schools came to Gandhiji for consultation and advice. Their school properties had been confiscated by the Government and they themselves had just been released from prison. "Very often at the root of our inaction lies a hidden, indefinable fear," Gandhiji said to them. "Satyagrahis should by their fearless conduct infect their neighbours with fearlessness."

If the Government sought to impose restrictions on them as a condition for restoring the school property or asked for an apology, what should they do? the teachers asked. "Of course, you must not comply," Gandhiji replied. "But why should you be afraid to act on your own? Why should you need to consult me at all in a matter like this? One must follow truth as one sees it in the faith that it is the only way of finding the absolute truth. Irresolution and indecision are very often an indication of mental lethargy. Everybody makes mistakes, but one must not sit still for the fear of making mistakes. As the Gita has it, the doubting soul perishes."

He had expected the "Quit India" struggle to be the last phase of the fight for freedom, he proceeded. But that was not to be. The people had not assimilated the message. Why did he then start the movement when he knew that the people had not fully assimilated the message of non-violence? "My answer is that it was my faith in non-violence and in God that induced me to act. Action is my motto. I am not anxious about the result. I must work with the instruments that God has placed at my disposal. I cannot create a new universe for myself. I have lived

for the dumb millions. I have faith they won't forsake me. I am, therefore, able to work without losing hope. I know all will be well in the end but we have to pass through the purgatory."

* * *

"Those who think there is nothing to do, do not know me. Those who think there is nothing else to do except to ply the Charkha also do not know me," Gandhiji said to still another group of workers. "The Charkha is of course there. But I have placed a definite programme before the country in addition to it. You should refresh your memories by re-reading my 8th August speech in the All-India Congress Committee."[9]

The 9th of August—the anniversary of the "Quit India" day—was approaching. How was it to be observed? And what was to be done if the authorities interfered with its observance? Gandhiji's advice was emphatic. There should be no militant programme. Only hand-picked people should participate. Every possible care should be taken to set all legitimate fears of the authorities at rest and to avoid giving any cause for provocation. But the observance must not be given up on any account. If even as individuals they renounced their right civilly to resist unjust executive orders, the lesson which they had learnt during the quarter of century's initiation in Satyagraha would be lost. He would, therefore, take all risk but not advise the giving up of the symbolical demonstration on the coming 9th August.

In accordance with his advice, 25 citizens of Bombay sent notice to the Police Commissioner of Bombay, a week in anticipation of 9th August, of their intention to offer silent prayer for five minutes and sing the flag salutation song before the statue of that great nationalist —the late Lokamanya Tilak—at the Chowpaty sands and then disperse. They asked for permission to perform the ceremony. In order that no crowds might collect the time and place were not announced to the public though the police authorities were duly informed of it to enable them to make their preparations. "If this extraordinary forbearance and precaution are not appreciated," ran a statement which Gandhiji issued on the eve of the observance, "and the authorities . . . interfere with the simple symbolic exercise of a public right, the fault will be that of the authorities."[10]

Gandhiji would have liked to send women Satyagrahis only, women being the symbol of non-violence. But it was then too late to alter the arrangements. The permission was refused. In the quiet of the morning on the 9th August, at half-past five, all the 25 Satyagrahis, while proceeding in batches of five to offer prayer and sing the flag salutation song before the Tilak statue, were arrested.

Symbolical Satyagraha confined to one place, while the whole country watched, provided a demonstration of the Satyagraha technique which proves most effective when the forces of violence are uppermost.

While Bombay performed the symbolical act, the attention and sympathy of the whole country was focussed on it. The disciplined refraining blunted the edge of repression while participation in the spirit by the millions in the symbolical act produced a resurgence of moral strength which would have been impossible if the people's sympathy and attention had been dissipated in a series of sporadic actions all over the country.

On the next Independence Day[11] (26th January, 1945) about 250 trainees taking training in Kanu Gandhi's work camp at Sevagram and the members of the various Sevagram constructive work institutions undertook a programme for village cleaning in the village of Sevagram. They were proceeding with baskets, buckets and broomsticks to their task in a double file when they were stopped by the police. They were told they could proceed only if they broke up the file. Their non-violence would have been sheer cowardice if under the circumstances they had yielded. They refused to break the file nor did they try to break through the police cordon but squatted on the ground. The police ultimately had to yield and the prescribed programme was gone through. Commented Gandhiji at the evening prayer: If they had lost their temper, if they had tried to break through the police cordon, the police would probably have resorted to firing. The firearms of the police were rendered useless before the dignified and yet firm attitude of the volunteers. The volunteers did not invite firing nor did they flinch. For them the real authority was the dictates of their hearts which he would call God or Truth. That little incident epitomised the whole of their freedom struggle. Tilak Maharaj had given them the *mantra* "Swaraj is our birthright". He had provided the other half by saying: "The way to it is through Truth and Non-violence." That way was possible for the millions if they practised constructive work. The union of constructive work with civil disobedience had led them from victory to victory. If they gloated over their success their very pride would prove their destruction. Humility was the hall-mark of a Satyagrahi.

3

The Indian Communists had been behind none in according welcome to Gandhiji on his release although their attitude towards the "Quit India" resolution, by which Gandhiji still swore, was one of open hostility. Their party had been under a ban till Russia changed sides and joined the Allies. After the Nazi invasion of Russia in 1941, the Communists declared that the war which they had hitherto denounced as an "Imperialist war" had become the "People's war". The ban against them was withdrawn and a truce was struck between them and the British authorities. Thereafter they had used all their resources to thwart the "Quit India" movement and in consequence their name

had fallen into bad odour with the public in general and Congressmen in particular.

The General Secretary of the Communist Party, P. C. Joshi, wrote to Gandhiji after his release that he would be very happy to "explain" to him the "policy" of their party. He met Gandhiji. A prolonged correspondence followed. Gandhiji mentioned to him all the complaints against their party that had come to him and put a few questions on his own.[12] In reply Joshi sent a long explanation. Gandhiji accepted the explanation on some points but the one about the "People's war" stuck in his throat:

I suggest that the title "People's war" is highly misleading....Russia's limited alliance with the Allied Powers cannot by any stretch of imagination convert what was before an imperialistic war against the Nazi combine into a people's war....It is superfluous for me...to answer your argument that "this war has split the world in two camps". Between Scylla and Charybdis, if I sail in either direction, I suffer shipwreck. Therefore I have to be in the midst of the storm....As I am composing this letter to you, I have read and re-read your argument. Every paragraph offends, for to me it lacks reality.[13]

As regards the answers to his remaining questions, Gandhiji did not feel satisfied either: "Your answers to the other questions do not admit of a categorical reply. . . . If I were free from prejudices, I would have no hesitation in accepting your answers. But my difficulty is real. . . . When I make the admission that I have prejudices, it is an appeal to you to have patience with me and to disarm my prejudice in the best manner you can. . . . I give you . . . assurance that I have not acted upon my prejudices, nor shall I do so unless the prejudices harden into a confirmed belief . . . "[14]

The Communists even resented the remark that they were trying to disrupt the Congress organisation from within. "There is no question of our adopting the policy of infiltrating the Congress organisation. We have been in the Congress ever since we were born as a Party."[15] No doubt they were in the Congress, nevertheless disruption of the Congress from within had been a recurring note of their policy as enunciated in their various "theses" which they secretly circulated from time to time to the members of their party, who were advised to function as a caucus within the Congress and covertly to sabotage Congress policies by all possible means.

The Communist Party's Secretary referred Gandhiji to common friends, for whom Gandhiji had regard and who were sure to give the Communist Party a clean bill. Answered Gandhiji: "No general assurance from them will obliterate the evidence that has forced itself upon me. . . . I will ask you not to dismiss all this evidence as so much prejudice."[16] Gandhiji concluded his letter with an entreaty:

I would ask you not to be angry with your critics....You will have legitimate cause for anger, if their criticism is malicious....Lastly...believe

me. . . I want to impress the services of every one of you for the cause of independence to be fought along the lines that I have chalked out for myself and the whole country. And if I am convinced that. . . yours is the correct method, I would like to be won over by you to your side and I will sincerely and gladly serve as an apprentice wanting to be enlisted as a unit in your ranks.

This brought him the following choice bit in reply: "If my own father had written to me what you have written, I would NOT have answered his letter and I would never again have gone to meet him. I am writing to you because you are the nation's Father. . . . I know you don't mean it but your ignorance of our views and your prejudices against our Party are so great that you don't even realise what you are writing. . . . I will discuss political issues with you only when you feel you have no more prejudices left. . . . "[17]

But it was precisely because he had prejudices which he wanted to have removed that Gandhiji had written at all. The Communist Party Secretary's letter proceeded: "We have been thinking hard what should make you so hostile towards us and the root lies in your own mistaken understanding of what Communism is. You are fundamentally a religious person and have an ethical code. You relate your fundamental religious belief to your political work. You seem to think that Communism means that 'the end justifies the means'. . . . This is an outmoded slogan against us. . . . We Communists are very 'religious' . . . even though we profess adherence to no religion."

The Communist Party's Secretary waxed indignant: "Have you ever cared to recall the words of the Communist delegates in the historic August A.I.C.C. meeting? What did they beseech you to do? To delete the operative clause and replace it by acceptance of self-determination and immediate negotiations with the League; this in fact is what you have done NOW." (The reference was to Gandhiji's meeting with Jinnah in September, 1944).

The two things were as different from each other as horse is from ass. To the Communists national freedom was only a stage in the struggle for the supremacy of world Communism. Their one concern was immediate mobilisation of all the resources of India for the defeat of Russia's enemies. They were, therefore, very anxious that the Congress and the Muslim League should unite at any price to offer themselves as a willing sacrifice, and, if necessary, even sacrifice India, so that Russia, which was to them their real Fatherland, might live. Their slogan was unconditional and all-out support to the Allied war effort—not the moral support which Gandhiji had offered and which postulated a moral basis for the Allied cause and its application forthwith to India and other subject races. Absence of a moral basis did not present any difficulty to the Communists so long as the supreme goal of the Russian victory was served. Of course, they wanted to weaken British imperialism and, therefore,

India to be freed from British control. But, whereas Gandhiji would not be a party to any arrangement which would jeopardise India's integrity, disruption held no terror for the Communists.[18] On the contrary, if disruption and chaos improved the chances of Communism in India or in the world, it was a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Joshi's letter ended with: "You don't trust my word over issues that in any decent society are taken for granted. . . . You treat me and our Party in the same way as Wavell treats you and the Congress."

Gandhiji could not afford to imitate the Communist manners. He replied: "I must apologise for the offence my language has caused you. . . . I wrote in all good faith. I could not come close to the Party if I did not disclose even my prejudices. I had expected appreciation for my friendly approach and frankness."[19]

The Communists suggested that the charge against them should be examined by a tribunal for which they gave names. Gandhiji sent the evidence that had come to him to one of them—Advocate Bhulabhai Desai. Bhulabhai was heavily preoccupied. He was not keeping very good health either. The Communists became impatient and complained of the delay. Finally Gandhiji sent them word:

> I can't hasten Bhulabhai. . . .He could give his opinion any day he chose. My fear is that it won't be an award. It would be the opinion of a distinguished lawyer on the papers in my possession. . . .I want to pass no hasty judgment. Many honest Congressmen came to me or wrote to me. . .that Communists have no principle save that of keeping their party alive and beating their opponents with any stick that came to their hands. I am not going to base my opinion on this evidence either. . . .I do not want to pass judgment against a political party.[20]

In answer to a question by a Congressman from South India, Gandhiji scribbled: "Communists cannot be excluded from the membership of the Congress. Those who subscribe to the aim and pay the membership fee can be members. The constitution says so. . . . As regards elective bodies . . . if people want them they will be elected. Communists as such cannot be dealt with nor can any action be taken against them as such. Individuals who have acted against the discipline of the Congress would be liable for action."

On the release of the Congress Working Committee in June, 1945, the Working Committee appointed a sub-committee consisting of Pandit Nehru, Sardar Patel and Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, to go into the charges of indiscipline against the Congress members of the Communist Party. This committee took note of Bhulabhai's finding: "It does appear that the views and attitude of the Communist Party after the 9th August (1942) have been to carry on propaganda contrary to the views and policy of the Congress." After going through all the evidence, the committee delivered its verdict that there was ample proof to

establish a strong *prima facie* case against the members of the Communist Party in the Congress: "At a time when the country was passing through a reign of terror and the Congress was involved in a life and death struggle, no organisation allied with the Congress could, without committing a serious outrage on the ordinary tenets of discipline, indulge in such hostile activities." It called upon the Communists to justify their position and show cause why action should not be taken against them. True to type, the Communists, instead of answering the charges against them and establishing their innocence, indulged in counter charges. In consequence the Congress was forced to take appropriate disciplinary action against them.

Gandhiji while trying to wean the Communists from their mistaken doctrine, continued to cultivate them individually. "If I know an honest Communist, and he cooperates with me," he told a Congress leader from Orissa, "I shall accept him." The quest did not prove fruitful but he never gave up. Nor could the Communists run away from him either.

4

During his incarceration Gandhiji had begun to have the disquieting feeling that while those who believed in violence had, in their own way, given a good account of themselves during the struggle, perhaps, the same could not be said about those who professed non-violence as their creed.

Years ago, to generate non-violent strength among the masses, Gandhiji had launched a number of constructive activities. The chief among them were hand-spinning and hand-weaving, removal of untouchability in law and in practice, resuscitation of the villages through the revival of dying and dead village crafts, and Basic Education. To work out these activities, he had brought into being the All-India Spinners' Association, the Harijan Sevak Sangh, the All-India Village Industries Association, and the Hindustani Talimi Sangh.

The All-India Spinners' Association or the Charkha Sangh had for its goal the revival and advancement of India's basic craft—hand-spinning and hand-weaving industry—which had fallen a casualty to the march of history but above all to the "arm of political injustice" during the early British rule. So closely interwoven, indeed, is the story of its decline and fall with the history of the advent of the British Power in India that to describe the one is to cover the other. By the same token its revival became a means and symbol of India's freedom struggle.

Organisationally, the All-India Spinners' Association constituted "the biggest voluntary cooperative society in the world", with a capital of nearly ten lakhs of rupees and an outturn of Rs. 12,002,430 worth of cloth.[21] It knit together in a common endeavour 3,024,391 spinners and 354,257 artisans spread over 15,010 villages of India. The total

wage bill distributed to the artisans through the Association during the first eighteen years of its existence was Rs. 46,030,081.

The Spinners' Association had passed through various phases. In the first phase, the emphasis was on the awakening of mass consciousness and the boycott of foreign cloth. In the second, the emphasis shifted to the realisation of the ideal of social justice through the introduction of the standard minimum subsistence wage. The experiment had scored a striking success in the first and a limited one in the last.

During the "Quit India" struggle, the brunt of repression had fallen upon all the constructive institutions. They were still licking their wounds when Gandhiji came out of jail.

Gandhiji had hoped that these institutions which he had built up would help to guide the enthusiasm of the people into the right channel by setting an example of the non-violence of the brave and provide an antidote to governmental repression. If they had succeeded, instead of despair and frustration, there would have been new faith and new hope in every Indian heart. As it was, they had fallen a victim to repression themselves. For Gandhiji this was a disturbing discovery:

> During my internment I have given deep thought to the spinning-wheel and the Spinners' Association. It has been borne in on me that should the Government desire to do so they could break the Spinners' Association. I would not care to exist on the mercy of Government. I have no need for any mercy except that of God. I, therefore, asked myself whether it would not be best to dissolve the Association and divide its capital among the villagers.[22]

The fault lay not with the ideal nor with the masses. The reason why the Spinners' Association had failed in its objective was that it had functioned as a highly centralised organisation.

> I had hoped that through it the message could penetrate to every village and every home in our country and that thereby we would be able to show to the world how a non-violent society could be built on the basis of the spinning-wheel. But. . . leave alone every home, the wheel has not yet even reached every village. . . . If it had been able to penetrate to the seven lakhs of villages, no power on earth could have crushed it. Government cannot send crores of men and women to jail nor can it mow down all this humanity by machine guns. Even if they killed one crore out of 40 crores, they could not have stopped our onward march to our goal. Indeed the speed of our march would have been accelerated.[23]

Again, the Spinners' Association had treated Khadi largely as an economic activity, but the role that he had envisaged for it was as a symbol of non-violence. They had allowed themselves to be too much quantity-minded or rather commercially-minded in regard to Khadi work with the result that, although as a programme of economic relief Khadi had fulfilled all expectations, its significance as a symbol of non-violence had somewhat receded into the background.

The fault lay not in Khadi but in those who were trying to work it. They had not developed sufficient awareness of the higher mission of Khadi and had but imperfectly realised the central truth of non-violence in their own lives and, therefore, could not infect the masses with the non-violence of the brave. They had now to retrace their steps. They should measure the success of Khadi thereafter not in terms of production and sale figures, nor even by the number of people wearing Khadi, but by the number of *men and women who could be taught to clothe themselves through their own effort with a clear consciousness of the ideals of Ahimsa, self-reliance and self-sufficiency*. Khadi work should, further, be pursued not as an isolated economic activity but as a means for the regeneration of the entire shattered economy of village life. For that they would need a new type of worker of a specially high calibre. He would have to be an all-rounder and represent in his person the ideal of *sthitaprajna*—the man of steady intellect, unruffled poise, as described in the Gita.

Many had taken to the wheel simply because of their faith in him. He wanted faith to be linked with knowledge so that it could withstand any onslaught.

Understanding faith makes the intellect keen. If we are able to understand the strength and effectiveness of non-violence and can cultivate a deep and abiding faith in it we shall be able to prove to the whole world that it is the greatest living force. Under its influence it is impossible for anyone to remain inactive or dull, just as it is impossible for darkness to prevail in the presence of light. Therefore, if the Spinners' Association is to come up to the expectation, every worker in it must be a living example of non-violence. Every action of his must be governed by it. His body must be healthy, his mind clear. And if he can order his life thus, the villagers will make the spinning-wheel their own without difficulty.[24]

The wheel could be a symbol of violence as well as of non-violence. Under the East India Company's regime, the spinning-wheel had become the symbol of the exploitation and slavery of the artisans, and the arrogance of the rulers. He, on the other hand, had taken up the wheel as the symbol of non-violence and deliverance of the masses through it. The same knife that took away life in the hands of a butcher could become the means of saving life in the hands of a surgeon.

He confessed that he had not laid as much emphasis as he should have on the spinning-wheel as a symbol of non-violence in the past. But it was never too late to mend. It was not for the Spinners' Association to blame the Congress for half-heartedness in the matter of Khadi. Rather they should take the blame upon themselves. If they had succeeded in demonstrating to the world the power which was in the wheel, and in their own person given proof of a living faith in non-violence, the Congress would have sought their help and guidance in order to carry the

message of the Congress to the villages, instead of the Association looking to the Congress for help.

They should forget politics and concentrate on the wheel, he finally told them. *They would then obtain striking political results.* Every village that assimilated the message of the wheel would begin to feel the glow of independence. If a true awakening could be created in India's seven hundred thousand villages, it would mean independence for the whole of India. For that they needed knowledge, diligence and deep study.

What was true of the Spinners' Association applied *mutatis mutandis* to other associations also.

"Wind up the All-India Spinners' Association as a centralised organisation for the production and distribution of Khadi," he advised. "Let it function solely as the custodian of the values for which Khadi stands and as a central research organisation for providing technical assistance and moral guidance to the local organisations."

The village should be the unit of Khadi activity and everyone should spin for self-sufficiency on a self-help basis.

As a corollary he suggested that Khadi thereafter should be sold only against a certain percentage of payment in self-spun yarn, so that those who wanted to wear Khadi should have to spin for themselves or give up Khadi altogether.

Many an old-timer stood aghast at this bold innovation. But Gandhiji was inexorable. "Some say that the new rule will in fact kill the Khadi which the poor are now producing and that only a few fashionable town-dwellers will spin and have cloth woven for themselves. . . . The masses do not eat for show but only in order that they may live. They wear clothes to cover their nakedness, not to be fashionable. Therefore, the spinning-wheel, like the oven, should find a place in every village home and every able-bodied person should spin. Thus alone can all wear Khadi and bring Swaraj."[25]

Suppose, for argument's sake, he proceeded with relentless logic, city people gave up wearing Khadi either through anger or laziness, and villagers, for consequent lack of wages, ceased to spin and weave, and if on account of it the existing Khadi shops had to close down and Khadi wearers to give up Khadi, "it will still be a triumph for truth, because it will be clear that the people had no real faith in non-violence and that they wore Khadi out of ignorance and deceived themselves into thinking that thereby they would obtain Swaraj. . . . The special claim for Khadi is that it is an unrivalled means for rescuing the masses from the idleness and inertia in which they are today plunged and for *creating the necessary strength in them for winning through.*"[26]

He asked them to cast out fear:

Are you afraid to enforce the rule about the sale of Khadi against yarn lest you should lose custom in cities? Unless you can cast out this fear from

your hearts it will *spell the death of Khadi for Swaraj*. Khadi has established for itself a prestige in society. The rich feel a pride in purchasing Khadi produced by the poor. But that is very little. If you restrict the scope of Khadi to no more than a source of relief to the poor, it will not help you to obtain Swaraj through non-violence. I do not want such a thing to happen but I would not mind if as a result of enforcing the rule about the sale of Khadi against yarn I am left the sole wearer of Khadi. . . . It would be better for Khadi to die a natural death, if that is God's will, than that it should be killed by our cowardice and lack of faith.[27]

With his unquenchable passion for truth, he concluded:

If we have failed, we ought to admit our failure and make it a prelude to further effort. . . . In other words we have to be ruthless in order exactly to find out what the possibilities and limitations of Khadi are. If, as a result of our inquiry, we find that Khadi cannot take us as far as we have claimed before the world, we ought to relinquish that claim or lower it, as the case may be, and adopt some other basis for the attainment of our goal.

I go so far as to say that even if poor relief Khadi disappears in the face of Khadi for Swaraj the poor will not be losers, because it will be possible to provide bread for the poor through other means. The pride of Khadi consists in subserving the ideal of Swaraj as well as helping the poor. For, only in such Swaraj can the poor really come into their own.

Freedom we shall have. I sense it is coming. But political freedom alone must not satisfy us. The world will not be satisfied either, for the world looks for great things from India. The freedom of my dreams means the Kingdom of God within us and its establishment through us on earth. And for this end I would prefer to die working even if I may never see its fulfilment.[28]

The Spinners' Association as a centralised organisation for the production and sale of Khadi was accordingly wound up and sale of Khadi against part-payment of its price in self-spun yarn became its official policy thereafter.

* * *

Last but not least in Gandhiji's arsenal of non-violence was Basic Education or the new system of education. It was as revolutionary in its conception as it was ambitious in its scope. It was based on the theory that it is the activity of what an eminent educationist has called "the thinking hand" which has, more than anything else, guided the evolution of man and society and, therefore, the whole education of man can be imparted through the medium of a basic handicraft. Its goal was to build up a "non-violent, non-exploiting social order" in which alone the ideals of freedom, equality and brotherhood can be fully and universally realised. At the core of it was the principle of non-violence. Gandhiji described it as an "all-in complex" of all the activities included in his constructive programme.[29]

Contemplation of non-violence in relation to the problems of India's millions had led Gandhiji to the conclusion that the system of education which they needed would have to be such as should (1) be able to pay its way, (2) enable them to provide themselves, through their own effort, means for a healthy, decent cultured existence, and (3) train not only their intellect but their physical and spiritual faculties as well. His experience had shown that what men do with their hands, in order to live, conditions their thinking and behaviour and entire outlook more than what they are taught by word of mouth. By correlating the teaching and practice of a socially useful manual craft with the why and wherefore of it, he argued, not only can the intellectual but also the physical and spiritual faculties of the child be fully developed.

The basic school of his conception was thus to be not an "idyllic" spot far removed from the problems of every-day life facing the child but a laboratory, where the children would be taught to find and test solutions of the problems in individual and community living facing them and their villages in a non-violent and democratic way, so that when they entered life, they would go fully equipped not only with the necessary knowledge but also the spirit of initiative, self-reliance and self-confidence begotten of their experience of learning through doing. And since their knowledge would have grown out of their practice of a truthful, non-violent and democratic way of life, it would carry with it the guarantee that it would be rightly used. A young Englishman, who had served in the Intelligence Branch of the Royal Air Force on the Burma front, after attending a meeting of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh at Sevagram, remarked: "Nowhere in the world have I seen the like of it. They are the only people who know their goal and the practical means of achieving it."

Gandhiji had a partiality for spinning, weaving and the allied processes as the medium for basic education on account of their universality, inter-relation with a prime human need, and little expense. If the experiment was efficiently conducted, he said, the work of the school—teachers and children combined—as a whole should cover the current expense of the school, i.e., provision for teachers' support and school contingencies, taking the seven years' period covered by basic training as a whole. Self-sufficiency was not laid down as a condition but as a test of the efficiency of the experiment.

The Hindustani Talimi Sangh, which Gandhiji had founded for the propagation of Basic Education in 1936, had completed the first seven years of its career when Gandhiji came out of prison. It had now to be launched on its next—the post-basic stage.

"We must not be content with our present achievements," warned Gandhiji addressing the basic teachers:

> We must penetrate the homes of the children. We must educate their parents. The scope of education must be extended. It should include education for everybody at every stage of life.

A basic school teacher must consider himself a universal teacher. As soon as he comes in contact with anybody, man or woman, young or old, he should say to himself, "Now, what can I give to this person?"

Won't that be presumption on his part? No. Supposing I come across an old man who is dirty and ignorant....It would be my job to teach him cleanliness, to remove his ignorance and widen his mental horizon. I need not tell him that I am to be his teacher. I will try to establish a living contact with him and win his confidence. He may reject my advances. I won't accept defeat but continue my effort till I succeed in making friends with him. Once that is achieved the rest must follow.

Again, I must have my eyes on the children right from their birth. I will go a step further and say that the work of the educationist begins even before that. The woman basic teacher will go to the expecting mother and tell her, "I am a mother as you will be. I can tell you from my experience what you should do to ensure the health of your unborn baby and your own." She will tell the husband what his duty towards his wife is and about his share in the care of their expected baby. Thus the basic school teacher will cover the entire span of life. Naturally his activity will cover adult education.

Adult education of my conception must make men and women better citizens all round....Agriculture will play an important part in adult education under the basic scheme. Literary instruction must be there. Much information will be given orally. There will be books—more for the teachers than the taught. We must teach the majority how to behave towards the minority and *vice versa*. The right type of adult education should cut at the very root of untouchability and communalism.

The constitution of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh was accordingly altered so as to include Pre-Basic, Post-Basic or university, and Adult Education in its scope.

* * *

The reorientation of the policy of the Charkha Sangh had meant putting the Khadi organisation in the reverse gear. What had hitherto been done was the erecting of a scaffolding which would be taken to pieces and removed as soon as the solid structure began to mount from bottom upwards. The next step was to integrate Khadi work with all-round village uplift work by linking it with village industries on the one hand and Basic Education on the other. For this purpose it was decided that the three institutions, namely, the Spinners' Association, the Village Industries Association and the Hindustani Talimi Sangh should have a joint board for coordination of their activities—all the three being linked to agriculture which would be the base.

It was further decided that necessary arrangements should be made to train the new, all-rounder type of worker needed to carry on the co-ordinated activities of the various associations in order to organise the villages on the basis of self-help and self-sufficiency. Gandhiji laid down

that there should be not more than one worker in each centre. This worker would be provided with initial capital equipment and maintenance expenses to start work but would be expected to become wholly self-sufficient at the end of a specified period—say three years—after which he should be able to carry on without any outside help. If even after three years, he failed to demonstrate his worth to the villages concerned by effecting an all-round economic, social and moral amelioration of his surroundings, so that the villagers would learn to look upon him as a labourer worthy of his hire and take upon themselves the charge of maintaining him and his activities, he must be set down as a failure.

Gandhiji laid the greatest emphasis on the one-worker-one-centre principle as it gave the fullest scope to the initiative, resourcefulness, originality and sense of responsibility of the worker concerned. This was vital if non-violent organisation of the people was to be achieved which would be able to function without any centralised direction or control and therefore not be put out of action even under the worst repression, and would be capable of being multiplied to the nth degree without any check or limit. It marked an important milestone in the evolution of Gandhiji's technique of non-violent organisation and planning.

Purged of communal disharmony and the taint of untouchability, the seven hundred thousand villages of India, healthy, self-sufficient, literate and cooperatively organised on the basis of non-violent crafts, could not be kept in bondage, argued Gandhiji. The task was tremendous. The majority of the people were attracted to political work by the excitement and the thrills which it provided. Quiet, unostentatious work in the villages seemed to them to be insipid. They wearied of it. Only a living faith in God—the Rock of Ages—could give that steadiness, perseverance and unflagging determination which are needed to overcome the inertia of the masses and mobilise one's inner resources for a sustained non-violent mass effort.

* * *

A young Harijan graduate came to Gandhiji in his Ashram at Sevagram to seek his help and guidance in connection with his work in the villages. He said to Gandhiji that he had a humanitarian outlook but did not believe in God.

"A humanitarian outlook is a necessity," Gandhiji told him, "but it can never be a substitute for God. God is there, but our conception of God is limited by our mental horizon and by our physical environment. . . . You are dissatisfied with the prevalent ideas about God, for the simple reason that those who profess belief in God do not present a living God in their own lives."

"As for you," he continued, "your ambition will be fulfilled if besides your ability and enthusiasm you introduce something else in your life, i.e., a living faith in God. Then all insipidity will vanish. Unless you have a living faith in God to sustain you, when failure stares you in

the face, there is disappointment in store for you. . . . My advice to you is that you should not leave this Ashram till you have found God. . . . The Ashram, apart from its inhabitants—the sum total of energy that it represents, the principles for which it stands—may enable you to know God to the extent that you may be able to say 'God is', just as you can say 'Truth is'."

"I can say that in the sense that Truth is the antithesis of falsehood," replied the young friend.

"That is good enough," said Gandhiji. "The seers have described God as 'Not this', 'Not this'. Truth will elude you. The sum total of all that is true is Truth. But you can't sum up all that is true. . . . You have got an analytical mind. But there are things that can't be analysed. A God who can be analysed by my poor intellect won't satisfy me. Therefore, I do not try to analyse Him. I go behind the relative to the absolute and get my peace of mind."

The friend resumed: "Your way of life appeals to me very much. It offers scope for the exercise of individual will. The idea of God introduces a determinism and that limits man. It interferes with his free will."

Gandhiji: "Is there such a thing as free will? What is it? We are all mere playthings in the hands of Providence."

"What is the relationship between God and man, between Truth and God?" the friend asked.

Gandhiji: "I have said Truth is God. He and His law are not different. God's law is God himself. To interpret it man has to resort to intense prayer and merge himself in God. Each one will interpret it in his or her own way. As for the relationship between man and God, man does not become man by virtue of having two feet and two hands. He becomes man by becoming the tabernacle of God."

"When my idea of God itself is not clear, your talk of man becoming the tabernacle of God makes things still more confusing."

"Yet it is the true conception. Unless we have the realisation that the body is the house of God, we are less than men. And, where is the difficulty or confusion in conceiving Truth as God? You will concede that we are not tabernacles of Untruth; we are of Truth."

After a moment of silence, he continued: "Everyone who wants to live a true life has to face difficulties in life, some of which appear insurmountable. At that time prayer and faith in God that is Truth alone will sustain you."

The young man fell into deep thought.

Gandhiji continued: "*The fellow-feeling which makes you feel miserable because of your brother's misery is godliness. You may call yourself an atheist, but so long as you feel akin with mankind you accept God in practice.* I remember clergymen who came to the funeral of the great atheist Bradlaugh. They said they had come to pay their homage because he was a godly man."

"If you go back with a living faith in God, in Truth," Gandhiji concluded, "I have no doubt that your work will flourish. You should feel dissatisfied with everything till you have found Him and you will find Him."

The young man stayed on in the Ashram and was followed by his *guru*—a professor and social worker of a rare vintage, who had suffered for his atheistical views. They continued to spell God with a small 'g', but the *guru* afterwards recorded his testimony: "He (Gandhiji) had not been averse to my atheism nor did his *god* scare me away." On the 26th January, 1945, he took the Independence Day pledge modified specially for him by Gandhiji: "I seek for the fulfilment of my pledge the assistance of that which we may or may not call divine but which we all feel within us."

Another visitor, a veteran nationalist leader from South India, who came to Gandhiji about the same time, in the course of a discussion with him on God and efficacy of prayer asked, "If you pray to God, can He intervene and set aside the law for your sake?"

Gandhiji: "God's law remains unaltered but since that very law says that every action has a result, if a person prays, his prayer is bound to produce an unforeseeable result in terms of His law..."

"But do you know the God to whom you pray?"

"No, I don't."

"To whom shall we pray then?"

"To the God whom we do not know—we do not always know the person to whom we pray."

"May be, but the person to whom we pray is knowable."

"So is God; and since He is knowable, we search. It may take a billion years before we find Him. What does it matter? So, I say, even if you do not believe, you must continue to pray, i.e., search. 'Help thou my unbelief' is a verse from the Bible to be remembered. But it is not right to ask such questions. You must have infinite patience, and inward longing. Inward longing obviates all such questions. 'Have faith and you will be whole' is another tip from the Bible."

"When I look at nature around me," the venerable visitor finally said, "I say to myself, there must be one Creator, one God and to Him I should pray."

"That again is reasoning," Gandhiji replied. "God is beyond reason. But I have nothing to say if your reason is enough to sustain you."

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The Harijan Sevak Sangh was the organisation that Gandhiji had founded in 1932, after his "Yeravda Pact Fast" (The Epic Fast), which had resulted in the reversal of the British Cabinet's decision in regard to the electoral arrangements for the representation of Harijans under the 1935 Government of India Act. Its objective was total removal of

the taint of untouchability in law as well as in fact from Hindu society. A new phase had been reached in its development also.

"Can the members of the Harijan Sevak Sangh truthfully claim to have eradicated the last trace of untouchability from their own hearts? Is their practice on a par with their profession?" Gandhiji asked at a meeting of the Harijan Sevak Sangh after his release.

A member: "What is your criterion in this respect?"

Gandhiji: "Are you married?"

"I happen to be."

"Then, have you an unmarried son or a daughter? If you have one, get him or her a Harijan for a bride or a bridegroom, as the case may be, in the spirit of a sacrament and I shall send you a wire of congratulations at *my* expense!"

Shortly afterwards, he decided to perform in the Ashram a marriage between the daughter of the atheist professor (a Brahmin) with a young atheist (Harijan) disciple of the professor, and further declared that thereafter his blessings would not be available to any wedding couple unless one of the parties was a Harijan!

5

After Kasturba Gandhi's death in the Detention Camp in February, 1944, when it was still a question whether Gandhiji would at all be permitted to come out of prison alive, the idea of having a National Memorial in the name of Kasturba had taken hold of the people's mind and a fund had been started to perpetuate her memory. A target of seventy-five lakhs of rupees had been fixed to correspond with Gandhiji's seventy-fifth birthday, the 2nd October, 1944, on which date the purse was to be presented to him *in absentia* if he were still in jail. It was the only outlet for the pent up public sentiment which could express itself in no other way under the blanket of governmental repression. By the appointed day the fund was oversubscribed by more than five lakhs.

Gandhiji was released in the meantime and on 2nd October, 1944, a purse of 80 lakh rupees was duly presented to him at a small informal function at Sevagram Ashram. Gandhiji marked the occasion by planting before Kasturba's deserted hut a slip from the sacred *Tulsi* plant, before which she used to offer her prayers in the orthodox Hindu style in the Detention Camp, and which we had brought away with us as a precious memento on our release.

What form should the memorial take? All types of plans were submitted and rejected after full consideration. Kasturba Gandhi was, what would today be considered, an illiterate, simple-hearted woman. Yet she was a pillar of strength to Gandhiji in his striving to realise the ideal of non-violence, and was in the forefront of all his non-violent

struggles in South Africa and in India. It was in the fitness of things that her memorial should reflect these aspects of her personality. Gandhiji, therefore, suggested that the memorial should take the form of a movement for the education, economic betterment and service of women and children in the villages irrespective of religion, caste or creed, and for training women workers.

Passionate suffragist that he was, he insisted on the executive of the organisation being composed exclusively of women. They should have the right, he explained, to ill-manage and mis-manage an organisation which would be their own. It did not matter if women were ill-governed so long as they were self-governed. They must be taken out of the leading strings of men. The women workers trained by the Trust, Gandhiji further insisted, must be imbued with the spirit of non-violence which animated Kasturba and in other respects represent her outlook on life.

What was the definition of "Kasturba's outlook on life"? The discussion waxed loud and long in one of the meetings of the Trust.

Gandhiji: "Kasturba's outlook on life means the outlook represented by Kasturba Gandhi, not Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi!"

There was poignant pathos behind that remark. As everybody knew, Kasturba had a personality and a will as strong as the Mahatma's. And in her sphere, it was the Mahatma more often than she who toed the other's line!

And so, the Kasturba National Memorial Trust became another instrument in the armoury of non-violence, its function being to release the power of non-violence latent in Indian womanhood.

The bulk of the Kasturba National Memorial Fund had been collected and contributed by the so-called capitalists. A number of them were on the original Board of Trustees. Gandhiji considered it a good sign that so many millionaires had not allowed themselves to be deterred by the fear of incurring Government's displeasure by identifying themselves with the memorial of the dead wife of a detenu condemned by the powers-that-be. He knew, he remarked, that some of them were supremely humanitarian. They allowed him to put his hands into their pockets. They had nothing to gain for themselves by his association with them. His contact with them took place after they had made their mark in the business world. His passion was to convert capitalists not into mere friends and patrons of the poor, he said, but willing sharers of their goods with them.

Some constructive workers, taking a narrow view of it, put forth a suggestion that the capitalists should resign from the Board of Trustees as soon as the work of collection was over. A fear was expressed that since the capitalists were on the Board of Kasturba Trust, they might dominate the organisation and defeat its goal owing to their conscious or unconscious capitalistic and urban bias. This was resented by some of the

trustees as an unwarranted insult and one of them even wrote an angry letter to Gandhiji about it.

Gandhiji characterised the workers' fear as an unworthy fear. The original trustees neither demanded nor had any desire to dominate the organisation. They had readily accepted additional names proposed by him for the Board of Trustees, and for the small executive. They would have voluntarily resigned from the Board, if he had wanted them to. But he was most anxious, he said, that they should not. He did not want them to feel that they were superseded and to cease to take any interest in the Trust. "I know I have been guilty of having given currency to the thought," he wrote in reply to a letter from J. R. D. Tata of the House of the Tatas, and one of the original trustees, "that the administration of trust funds should in practice be left to the trustees of my choice. I discovered my mistake before any mischief was done. The more I think about it, the more I feel the narrowness underlying such a conception. The whole board is a very happy combination and if most of the trustees take an active interest in the administration of the fund, we may expect even unthought of beneficial results. *An active combination and cooperation of top city men and simple-minded men and women is not an every day experience.*"[30] (Italics mine).

Raising of huge funds for his various political and non-political (constructive) activities brought Gandhiji into intimate contact with the moneyed and capitalist class. He freely accepted their donations freely given though he treasured the poor man's coppers even more highly than the rich men's millions. His association with the moneyed men was characterised by some as "a sign of weakness and unworthy of truth and non-violence". Gandhiji, on the contrary, considered such association as essentially a sign of his non-violence. Even a savant and philosopher like Romain Rolland had once felt shocked that Gandhiji had with gusto given his autograph to a member of the family of a leading figure in one of the armament combines. Gandhiji's philosophy was different. He always drew a sharp distinction between man and the system; it was an essential part of his non-violent approach. While he had no truck with capitalism, he never regarded capitalists as irredeemable or worse than members of any other class. Indeed, he had often found, he said, that those who railed against the capitalists most vituperatively, were not averse to becoming capitalists themselves if they had a chance, and in the little and big acts of their daily lives betrayed, in a more or less degree, most of the failings of the capitalists whom they denounced. Once when a blue stocking was indulging in a tirade against, "Ah! these millionaires", he silenced her with, "Wait, till you become one!"

His Ahimsa required him to be rigorous in viewing his own shortcomings but to be charitable in judging others'. It was enough if he could eradicate his own. He would have belied his creed, he told the ardent anti-capitalist crusaders, if he had adopted a "holier than thou" attitude

and refused to associate with his moneyed friends as he had been advised. Far from allowing himself to be exploited by them, it was he, he said, who was openly and unashamedly exploiting them for the cause of the poor. In answer to the criticism that he was even more tender towards capitalist exploiters than towards their victims, he once told Norman Cliff that if his non-violence was made of that stuff it should be suppressed. "Of course capitalists are among my friends and I take pride in the fact that they accept me as a friend. But I fight them when I feel there is need and no-one fights them harder. I fought the mill-owners as I suppose nobody had fought them and successfully."[31] That, in the circumstances, he could still retain the friendship of the capitalists and the mill-owners, he said, must be regarded as a tribute to his Ahimsa. He could not say to the rich that unless they renounced all their riches, he would have nothing to do with them. "Complete renunciation of one's possessions is a thing which very few even among ordinary folk are capable of. All that can legitimately be expected of the wealthy class is that they should hold their riches and talents in trust and use them for the service of society. To insist on more would be to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs."[32]

CHAPTER IV

THE COMMUNAL TRIANGLE

1

It was Monday, Gandhiji's day of weekly silence. The conversation on his part was, therefore, being carried on by written slips. He was trying to persuade Rajaji—the veteran Congress leader Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, or Rajaji as he is affectionately known among his friends—to come and stay with him for some time at Sevagram.

Rajaji: "I may be able to come to Sevagram by the 30th."

Gandhiji: "So, I shall look out for you by the time you mention."

Rajaji: "If you so desire."

Gandhiji: "What is the meaning of 'looking out for you'?"

Rajaji: "One looks out for dangers, too, sometimes!"

Gandhiji: "You may put it that way. I want that danger also. I have to compare notes about several things."

Rajaji: "I hope both of us will have by then forgotten some of our notes so that there will be none left!"

Gandhiji: "Then we shall laugh together and fatten!"

The topic then changed to saltless diet.

Gandhiji: "I have lived without salt for years in South Africa. Here I interrupted the rule but reverted to the saltless diet on further consideration."

Rajaji: "When people are made to do without salt in their diet, they are likely to take to licking walls and eating clay like children to satisfy their natural craving for salt!"

Gandhiji: "It will do them good. The walls will be cleaner! This is the beginning of the laugh we shall abandon ourselves to in Sevagram."

It was now 9.45 p.m., getting late for Gandhiji to go to sleep.

Gandhiji: "Now I am going to leave you if I am also to love you!"

A meeting between Gandhiji and Rajaji was an event always to be looked forward to and by none more eagerly than Gandhiji himself. Whenever they met, it was a feast of wit, wisdom and sparkling good humour. But in 1942 Rajaji had differed from his Congress colleagues and Gandhiji on the "Quit India" demand, and had in consequence resigned from the Congress Working Committee. Knowing how unpopular his political views had become with a large section of Congressmen, including the Congress High Command, Rajaji had deliberately been keeping himself away from Gandhiji after Gandhiji's release, at

least till Gandhiji had made his first statement on the questions of the day, as he did not want to give anyone a chance to suspect that he had influenced the Mahatma's decisions. That had made Gandhiji all the more eager to meet him. There was far more in common between them on the human plane than the differences that had of late marked their respective approach to some of the political problems of the day. Rajaji had mortgaged his heart to Gandhiji even before he had met him since the fame of the Mahatma's South African deeds had reached India and Gandhiji—the fisher of men—on his part had ever sworn that a richer haul than Rajaji had not come into his net.

Ever since the arrest of the Congress leaders in August, 1942, (Rajaji was not arrested because of his known opposition to "Quit India") Rajaji had been striving to bring about a *rapproachement* between the Congress and the Muslim League for the solution of the political deadlock. An intellectual child of the "Age of Reason" with unbounded faith in his power of persuasion, Rajaji felt that if the Congress and the Muslim League could be brought together on a common platform, the battle of independence would be won in no time. He had further persuaded himself that if the Congress agreed to the right of self-determination for the Muslim-majority areas, as demanded by the Muslim League, the League would join hands with the Congress in demanding Indian independence and it would not then be possible for the British Power to refuse their joint demand.

Both the premises were wrong. Jinnah was not prepared to have any settlement with the Congress while there was hope of securing better terms from the British Power which was always willing to oblige at India's expense, and the British Government was not prepared to transfer power, come what may, at least during the pendency of the war. Had Rajaji's expectations been realised, it would have certainly belied the whole history of the Muslim League's communal policy, and the British policy of divide and rule. But to discover that for himself Rajaji needed to make an attempt.

During Gandhiji's fast in the Detention Camp, therefore, when the jail gates were temporarily forced open, Rajaji took the opportunity to put before him a formula for bringing about a settlement between the Congress and the Muslim League. The salient features of his formula, later known as the Rajaji formula, were: (1) The Muslim League should endorse the Indian demand for independence and cooperate with the Congress in the formation of a Provisional Interim Government for the transitional period; (2) the Congress would agree, after the termination of war, to the appointment of a commission for demarcating contiguous districts in the north-west and north-east of India, wherein the Muslims were in absolute majority; (3) in the areas thus demarcated a plebiscite of all the inhabitants held on the basis of adult franchise or some equivalent device would decide the issue of separation from India. If the

majority decided in favour of forming a sovereign State separate from India, such decision would be given effect to; (4) in the event of separation, mutual agreement would be entered into for safeguarding defence, commerce, communications, and other essential matters; and finally (5) these terms would be binding only in case of transfer by Britain of full power and responsibility for the governance of India.

Gandhiji did not need a moment's consideration to give his approval to it. Armed with his approval, Rajaji approached Jinnah, the President of the Muslim League. But Jinnah expressed his inability to approve of the formula as it did not meet the League's full demand for Pakistan. In a speech before the Muslim League Council he later characterised it as "a shadow and husk, maimed, mutilated, and moth-eaten Pakistan".[1] He, however, offered to put the formula for consideration before the Muslim League Council if Rajaji so desired. Knowing full well that no useful purpose would be served by putting the formula before the Council without having in the first instance Jinnah's own approval, and feeling that it would be unfair to the public and hardly do justice to the scheme if it was disposed of in that hole-and-corner fashion, Rajaji released his formula, along with his correspondence with Jinnah, to the Press. To Jinnah he finally wrote: "With it private negotiations end. It is necessary to take the public into confidence now."

At this stage Gandhiji entered into the picture.

Four days before the "Quit India" resolution was passed by the All-India Congress Committee, on the 4th August, 1942, Gandhiji had made an important advance for a Congress-League settlement to Jinnah through a common Muslim friend—Meklai. The following were the terms of Gandhiji's offer:

> Provided the Muslim League co-operated fully with the Congress demand for immediate independence without the slightest reservation, subject of course to the provision that independent India will permit the operations of the Allied armies in order to check Axis aggression and thus to help both China and Russia, the Congress will have no objection to the British Government transferring all the power it today exercises to the Muslim League on behalf of the whole of India, including the so-called Indian India. And the Congress will not only not obstruct any Government that the Muslim League may form on behalf of the people, but will even join the Government in running the machinery of the free State.

This was by way of clarification of a public declaration of a similar nature made by the Congress President, Maulana Azad, some time earlier. But Jinnah had replied that he could not take note of any offer or any proposition that was not directly made to him. Gandhiji was not the one to stand on ceremony and he would have met Jinnah had he not a few days later been all of a sudden put into detention.

In April, 1943, during Gandhiji's detention, speaking before the open session of the Muslim League at Delhi, Jinnah had declared that nobody would welcome it more than he if Gandhiji was really willing to come to a settlement with the Muslim League: "If that is Mr. Gandhi's desire, what is there to prevent him from writing direct to me? . . . Strong as this Government may be in this country, I cannot believe that it would have the daring to stop such a letter if it were sent to me. It would be a very serious thing indeed if such a letter were stopped. . . . If there is any change of heart . . . he has only to drop a few lines to me. Then the Muslim League will not fail."

In answer Gandhiji wrote to Jinnah a letter expressing his willingness to meet him: "There seems to be an 'if' about your invitation. Do you say I should write only if I have changed my heart? God alone knows men's hearts. I would like you to take me as I am. Why should not both you and I approach the great question of communal unity as men determined on finding a common solution and work together to make our solution acceptable to all who are concerned with it or interested in it?"[2]

The Government stopped this letter from reaching Jinnah, but made the "substance" of it available to him. Thereupon Jinnah declared that this was not the kind of letter which he had wanted Gandhiji to write to him. He wanted Gandhiji first to agree to the Muslim League demand for Pakistan and then write to him! "This letter of Mr. Gandhi can only be construed as a move on his part to embroil the Muslim League to come into clash with the British Government solely for the purpose of his release."[3]

Revealing the substance of the letter, while withholding the letter, eminently suited both the parties to the tacit conspiracy this time—Jinnah and the British Power. But when next time, during the Cabinet Mission's negotiations, Jinnah fell for the "substance" of a Congress letter at Lord Wavell's hands, without waiting for the text, it cost him dear. (See Chapter IX, Section 2).

What Gandhiji could not do while he was in prison, he set out to do as a free man after his release. At the same time as he wrote his letter to Churchill in the small hours of the night of 17th July, 1944 ("trust and use me for the sake of your people and mine"), he also wrote a letter to Jinnah addressing him as "Brother Jinnah" and signing the letter as "Your brother, Gandhi":

> There was time when I was able to induce you to speak in the mother tongue. Today I venture to write to you in the mother tongue. I have already suggested a meeting between you and me in my invitation from jail. I have not yet written to you since my release. Today I feel prompted to do so. Let us meet whenever you wish. Do not regard me as an enemy of Islam or of Indian Muslims. I have always been a servant and friend to you and mankind. Do not disappoint me.

The letter was deliberately written in Gujarati—the common mother tongue (whose very existence was denied in the philosophy of Pakistan) of the Hindus, Parsis and the Muslim community to which Jinnah belonged in Kathiawad and Gujarat. Prompt came the reply from "Brother Jinnah", in English, from the House Boat "Queen Elizabeth" in Srinagar to "Dear Mr. Gandhi", informing him that he would be "glad to receive" Gandhiji at his house in Bombay on his return from Kashmir some time in the middle of August, 1944. Wrote Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, the Liberal leader, to Gandhiji: "I have no doubt that a big man like you can afford to be 'received'!"

2

What had made Jinnah and the Muslim League so intransigent and what was this communal triangle which baffled all attempts of not only the whole of nationalist India but at a later stage of British statesmen, too?

There were three sides to the communal triangle—the Congress, the Muslim League and the British Power—representing the forces of nationalism, communalism[4] and imperialism respectively, engaged in a final struggle for survival.

Inside this triangle and cutting across its sides was another triangle representing the economic struggle that was in progress at the same time. There were three parties to it, too. First there was the British Power and the landed and other interests in India. Secondly, there was the middle class struggling for freedom from domination from above but parasitic in relation to those below. And thirdly, there were the masses ground down by two centuries of exploitation under foreign rule, conscious only of their misery and filled with a yearning for a better state which independence connoted to them.

The discontented Muslim masses were susceptible to an appeal to their communal sentiment. That sentiment might have had a basis in reality some time in the historic past. But, as Mr. Casey, onetime Governor of Bengal, observed, the grievance had long since ceased to be operative and now rankled only as a memory. The Muslim League assiduously worked it up to create a state of mind that could only be called, to use Mr. Casey's expression, "Hindu-phobia". Observed Mr. Casey: "The Hindus, even if they wanted to, are (were) no longer in a position to inflict social indignities and humiliations on the Muslims."[5]

The communal problem was the creation of the reactionary forces represented by the British Imperialism in alliance with the conservative and the bourgeois sections in India. They captured communalism in their struggle for political power, to disrupt the nationalist movement which threatened their security. What could be easier, for instance, than to tell the discontented Muslim masses that their misery was due to

the Hindu money-lender, or to the Hindu zamindar, who were to them a reality, and to gloss over the tell-tale fact that the bulk of the Muslim League big guns were themselves remnants of the old feudal order—titled and landed gentry.

And so Jinnah, onetime ardent Home Ruler, as the exponent of communalism found in the British Tory diehards and the British Indian bureaucrats and conservative landed and other vested interests, representing the old feudal order, his best allies, and felt it necessary to invoke the Islamic State in spite of his liberalism. He even attended the Friday Muslim prayers dressed in a *sherwani* in place of his usual Bond Street sartorial outfit.

Communalism was not the name of a religious conflict carried on under a political label or of an economic conflict under the garb of religion. It was the result simply of confused thinking common to many classes which those who were playing for political power distorted and exploited for their own ends. A notable instance of this was the script question, i.e., whether the Devanagari or the Persian script should be the script for the *lingua franca*, which figured so largely in the controversy for partition, when less than 10 per cent. of the Indians knew even how to read and write.

Religious differences there had been in India even before the British arrived. Bigots and fanatics and internecine feuds among the various warring sects were not unknown in pre-British India. But the overall picture that met the eye was one of amalgamation and synthesis of races and religions, languages, cultures and creeds. Muslim rulers had non-Muslim ministers, generals and councillors, whom they trusted and of whom they were proud, and the Hindu and Sikh rulers had Muslim ministers, generals and councillors in the same way. There were confederacies of Muslims and non-Muslims, there were great eclectic religious movements represented by several schools of Sufism with sages and saints revered alike by Hindus and Muslims. Urdu itself, the language of the vast bulk of the Muslims in north India, was an amalgam of Persian and the Sanskritic dialect prevalent in India when the Muslims arrived. The struggle for power never took a separatist turn and by and large left the masses untouched. The phenomenon of mass rivalry between Hindus and Muslims and the movement for separation of which Jinnah and the Muslim League became the mouthpiece (as an ex-Governor of the Punjab, Sir John Maynard, writing in *Foreign Affairs*, London, testified) began under British rule. "It is, of course, true," wrote Sir John, "that British authority could not have established and could not now maintain itself but for the fissiparous tendency, of which the Hindu-Muslim antagonism is one manifestation. It is also true that the mass rivalry of the two communities began under British rule. Persecuting rulers made their appearance from time to time in the

pre-British era. . . . But the Hindu and Muslim masses . . . worshipped peacefully side by side at the same shrines."

It was no sudden or spontaneous development either. Behind it lay a whole chapter of British Imperial diplomacy. A recital of this painful chapter is rendered necessary here as it provides the key to the understanding of what followed. As any biologist will tell us, embryology holds the secret of many an anatomical riddle.

It was Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay, who in a minute dated 14th May, 1859, wrote that "*Divide et Impera* was the old Roman motto, and it should be ours."[6]

It was again a British Commandant, Col. John Coke, who at about the time of the Indian rising of 1857, wrote: "Our endeavour should be to uphold in full force the (for us fortunate) separation which exists between the different religions and races, not to endeavour to amalgamate them."

During and after the rising of 1857, which ended the last vestige of the Moghul rule in India, the Muslims were under a cloud. "To them were attributed all the horrors and calamities of that terrible time."[7] They were discriminated against, "shut out alike from official employ and from the recognised professions."[8] Those who had taken part in the rising—the ruling class, their dependants and beneficiaries, particularly the Muslim gentry—took long to be reconciled to the new order. Partly out of resentment of what they had suffered at the hands of the British (and this included spoliation and extermination of the old Muslim system of education[9]) they did not take kindly to English education and their share in the middle class development remained weak. The English-educated Hindu forged ahead in the services, in industry and in commerce.

Round about 1871, fifteen years after the rising of 1857, when the anti-British sentiment among all sections of the Muslims had grown to a dangerous extent, the British began to feel that the Government's past policy in respect of the Muslims was inexpedient. It found expression in the championship of the Muslims—"a race ruined under the British rule"[10]—by W. W. Hunter, a British official in the Government of India.

This feeling was accentuated after the rise of the nationalist movement in the middle eighties in which the Hindu intelligentsia—being the more advanced—were naturally more prominent. The first session of the Indian National Congress was held at Bombay in 1885. It was attended by only two Muslims. The second one in the next year in Calcutta was attended by 33, and the sixth in 1890, by 156 Muslim delegates out of a total of 702, or 22 per cent. As more and more Muslims began to be drawn to the movement, the British Government became restive. To win the Muslims back to loyalty to the British thereafter became the recognised official policy.

In a letter dated 11th May, 1906, to Lord Minto, the then Viceroy, Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for India, referring to a conversation he had with the Prince of Wales who had been on a visit to India, wrote: "He talked of the National Congress rapidly becoming a great power. . . . There it is, whether we like it or not."[11]

Lord Minto wrote back: "I have been thinking a good deal lately of a possible counterpoise to Congress aims. I think we may find a solution in the Council of Princes or in an elaboration of that idea, a Privy Council not only of Native Rulers, but of a few other big men. . . . "[12]

Five weeks later, on the 19th June, 1906, the Secretary of State again wrote to the Viceroy: "Everybody warns us that a new spirit is growing and spreading over India. Lawrence, Chirol, Sydney Low, all sing the same song: 'You cannot go on governing in the same spirit; you have got to deal with the Congress Party and Congress principles, whatever you may think of them. Be sure that before long Mohammedans will throw in their lot with the Congressmen against you and so on and so forth.' I do not know how true this may or may not be."

Lord Minto's reply of 27th June, 1906, showed that he was fully alive to the danger.

What followed is a matter of history. On 1st October, 1906, His Highness the Aga Khan led a deputation of Muslims to Lord Minto at Simla ("command performance") to ask that "the Mohammedan community should be represented as a community" and that the position of the Mohammedans should be estimated "not merely on their numerical strength but in respect to the political importance (which the late irrepressible Maulana Mohammad Ali, the nationalist Muslim leader, used to paraphrase as 'political impotence'!) of the community and the service it rendered to the Empire."

Lord Minto replied in terms that thereafter set the pattern for all official pronouncements relating to communalist claims: "I am entirely in accord with you. . . . I can only say that the Mohammedan community may rest assured that their political rights and interests as a community will be safeguarded by any administrative reorganisation with which I am concerned."

Following upon the deputation to the Viceroy the Muslim League was formed the same year.

Interesting light is thrown on the origin and nature of H. H. the Aga Khan's performance by an entry in *Lady Minto's Diary* under the date 3rd October, 1906. Referring to the death of Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, "the great Mohammedan leader" one finds the following, mentioned as among his good points: "He it was who engineered the recent Mohammedan deputation." In the same Diary under the date 1st October, 1906, which is set down as "a very eventful day, and epoch in Indian history", is another equally illuminating entry. That evening Lady Minto received a letter from an official (name undisclosed) which ran: "I must

send Your Excellency a line to say that a very big thing has happened to-day, a work of statesmanship that will affect India and Indian history for many a long year. It is nothing less than the pulling back of 62 millions of people from joining the ranks of the seditious opposition."

The philosopher-statesman Secretary of State for India in his letter to the Viceroy dated 28th January, 1909, warned: "We have to take care that in picking up the Mussalmans we do not drop our Hindu parcels and this makes it impossible to blurt out the full length to which we are or we may be ready to go in the Moslem direction."

Later, however, as the fruits of this policy began to give him a fore-taste of what was coming, the Liberal British statesman in Lord Morley began to feel uneasy. On 6th August, 1909, we find him writing to Lord Minto in regard to Sir Theodore Morrison, who was pressing the suit for his Muslim clients too hotly in the India Council: "Morrison is pertinacious up to the eleventh hour about his M. friends; insists on our pledges, and predicts a storm of M.'s reproach and dissatisfaction. It may be so. On the other hand, G. predicts that departure from the line we have agreed upon in our dispatch, would provoke at least as much reproach and dissatisfaction among the Hindus."

On 26th August, he again wrote to Lord Minto: "Morrison tells me that a Mohometen is coming over here . . . to see me. . . . Whatever happens, I am quite sure that it was high time to put our foot definitely down and let them know that the process of haggling has gone on long enough, come what may. I am only sorry we could not do it earlier."

The last entry under 6th December, 1909, relating to this dismal episode, records the Secretary of State for India writing to his Viceroy with ill-concealed chagrin: "I won't follow you again into our Mohammedan dispute. Only I respectfully remind you once more that it was your early speech about their extra claims that first started the M. hare. I am convinced my decision was best."

But it was too late. The "counterpoise to Congress aims" was created in the form of communal representation in the Minto-Morley Reforms. Sixty-two million Muslims were "pulled back" from joining the seditious ranks. A Governor of East Bengal (Lord Curzon's creation), Sir Bampfylde Fuller, summed up the new policy in a classical phrase —the "favourite wife" policy! Gandhiji gave it the more familiar name "monkey justice" after the fable of two cats and a loaf of bread, who went to "justice monkey" for a settlement of their dispute and got nothing for their share, while the wily "judge" appropriated the whole to himself as his legal fee!

The most surprising part of it was that the very power that had deliberately started the "hare" of communalism, later called upon nationalist India to run it to the ground or be kept out of its own. The device of the communal electorates served its purpose so well, in the sense in which it was devised, that a decade later we find a successor Secretary of

State for India, Montagu, and the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, put it on record that, "Division by creeds and classes means the creation of political camps organised against each other, and teaches men to think as partisans and not as citizens. . . . We regard any system of communal electorates, therefore, as a very serious hindrance to the development of the self-governing principle."[13] The authors of the Montford scheme of Reforms went on to add that the principle works so well that once it has been fully established, it so entrenches communalism that one could hardly then abandon the principle even if one wished to do so.

And so the system of communal franchise was retained in Montford Reforms also.

For a brief while, during the momentous Khilafat days (1920-24) nationalism became the order of the day and communal antagonisms were all forgotten.[14] To this golden period of Hindu-Muslim unity, Gandhiji continued nostalgically to return till the end of his days. After the collapse of the Khilafat movement, following upon the abolition of the Khilafat by Mustafa Kemal Pasha, communalism was once more set into motion, and right almost till the end the "divide and rule" technique continued consciously and deliberately to be used by the British Power to thwart the forces of nationalism in the struggle for independence. Lord Olivier, Secretary of State for India in the Labour Government under Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, admitted it in as many words: "No-one with any close acquaintance of Indian affairs will be prepared to deny that on the whole there is a predominant bias in British officialdom in India in favour of the Muslim community, partly on the ground of closer sympathy but *more largely as a make-weight against Hindu nationalism.*"[15] (Italics mine).

The Frankenstein of communalism had by now begun to give its creator an occasional headache by its unpredictable pranks. That made a tactical variation in its management sometimes necessary. It came into play on the next occasion.

In January, 1925, Lord Birkenhead, the then Secretary of State for India, wrote to Lord Reading, the Viceroy: "The more it is made obvious that these antagonisms (supported by the infinite variation of nationality, sect and religion) are profound and affect immense and irreconcilable sections of the population, the more conspicuously is the fact illustrated that we, and we alone, can play the part of composers."[16]

Three years later, the ten years' limit fixed by the authors of the Montford scheme for determining the next instalment of political reforms was about to expire and the chance of the Labour Party being returned to power in the next elections was in the offing. In November, 1927, the announcement about the appointment of the "all-white" Simon Commission, which was to report on the progress of the constitutional reforms introduced in 1921 (Montford Reforms) and to make recommendations for further advance, was made. Ostensibly this was

done in response to "Indian political pressure to secure anticipation of the statute" but really because "we could not afford to run the slightest risk that the nomination of the 1928 Commission should be in the hands of our successors."[17]

The opposition to this move was so great that not only the Congress but a number of other political parties, including a section of the Muslim League under Jinnah, boycotted it. His Lordship thereupon sent the following directive to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, on 10th January, 1928: "We have always relied on the non-boycotting Moslems, on the depressed community, on the business interests, and on many others, to break down the attitude of boycott."[18] And again: "I should advise Simon to see at all stages important people who are not boycotting the Commission, particularly Moslems and the depressed classes. I should widely advertise all his interviews with representative Moslems. The whole policy now is . . . *to terrify the immense Hindu population by the apprehension that the Commission having been got hold of by the Moslems, may present a report altogether destructive of the Hindu position, thereby securing a solid Moslem support*, and leaving Jinnah high and dry."[19] (Italics mine).

Further lines of cleavage were suggested by his Lordship in the course of the same letter in the following terms: "Dominion Status means the 'right to decide their own destinies', and this right we are not prepared to accord to India. . . . It is fair to infer from this that separatism (the movement for severing the tie with Britain) should be regarded as a hostile movement, and if that is so, its representatives ought not to be treated in the same way as the representatives of other political movements, which though they may be unreasonable or ill-timed, are not illegitimate."

History does not repeat itself but the basic patterns of events very often do. What Minto sowed Morley had to reap; what Lord Linlithgow did Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Sir Stafford Cripps had to pay for. Nor was Lord Birkenhead the only British high functionary to "leave Jinnah high and dry" when Jinnah refused to adjust himself to the shifting exigencies of British diplomacy as at the time of Partition.

The British Power missed no opportunity to encourage the fissiparous trend and to turn it into a vested interest. It conferred titles, positions, jobs with big emoluments and other concessions and perquisites, which it was within its power to give to those who advocated and encouraged disunity while all those who worked for union between the various religious groups were not only ignored but were made targets of special governmental displeasure. In the matter of consultation and representation in political discussions only the communalist Muslim section was given official recognition while numerous other influential Muslim organisations including the nationalist Muslims were not recognised.

In pursuance of this policy, at the Second Round Table Conference in London, in 1931, no nationalist Muslim was invited while the British

Power's "old stand by", H.H. the Aga Khan, was summoned to lead his Muslim contingent to oppose, with the help of "depressed classes", and sidetrack India's demand for the transfer of political power.

Every care was taken to prevent a successful settlement between the parties themselves by encouraging the expectation that the ruling power could always be counted upon to confer more on the intransigent group than the other parties could reasonably yield. An outstanding instance was in 1932, when the Hindus and Muslims had all but arrived at a complete agreement among themselves in the Unity Conference at Allahabad. The only important issue that remained to be settled was the reconstitution of Sind, which at that time formed a part of Bombay Presidency, into a separate Muslim-majority Province, and the adoption of the system of joint electorate in the place of separate electorate. But just when the Muslim representatives in the conference had agreed to joint electorate on the condition that Sind was constituted a separate Province, Sir Samuel Hoare, the then Secretary of State for India, went out of his way to concede the same demand without joint electorate. As a result the conference failed.

During the quarter of a century since the system of separate electorate was introduced, a considerable rich middle class had grown up among the Muslims. With the prospect of democratic political reforms, which were later embodied in the 1935 India Act, this wealthy conservative Muslim class began to feel uncertain as to their future. With their financial help and support the Muslim League was resurrected. Jinnah, who had retired from politics and taken to Privy Council practice in England after the Second Round Table Conference, was invited to return to lead the Muslims. He reorganised the Muslim League, and Muslim communalism entered upon a new phase of its career. The League had not yet been sufficiently organised when the 1937 elections took place with the result that it got less than 5 per cent. of even the Muslim votes while the Congress swept the polls and was invited to take power in 7 out of 11 Provinces.

The framers of the 1935 Government of India Act had expected that, with their power at the Centre still intact, they would, by dint of the vast reserve powers of interference vested in the Governors of the Provinces, be able to create a breach between Congressmen inside and outside the Legislatures, and play off the various communities, groups, sections and vested interests against one another, so that they would all look to the British for patronage and support. That would prevent full Provincial autonomy from being exercised by the Congress Ministries. This expectation of theirs was foiled by Gandhiji's wise, far-seeing and resolute firmness and the political genius of the Congress High Command. The Congress refused to accept office unless there was an assurance that the Governors would not make use of their veto and emergency powers, and that the advice of the Ministries would not be "set

aside in regard to their constitutional activities". The Governors refused to divest themselves of "certain obligations" which the Parliament had imposed upon them and a constitutional deadlock followed. The Assemblies were not called in seven Provinces, Interim Ministries were appointed to "conceal" this "breakdown", as Prof. Berriedale Keith put it. For four months the Congress stood out. As the statutory period for the convening of the Assemblies drew near, the Government always "ultra-sensitive over questions of prestige" yielded, and the Congress Ministries took over power in the seven Provinces, while in the remaining four Provinces Independent Coalition Ministries functioned.

Disruption in the Congress ranks was prevented by sending second-line leadership in the legislatures and the Provincial Cabinets, while the bulk of the top-ranking leaders kept out and set up a Parliamentary Board to direct, regulate and keep under strict discipline the working of the Congress Ministries. At the same time the chances of the Governors to set up intrigues within the Cabinet over which they had the statutory right to preside, were eliminated by the technique, which the Congress Ministers adopted, of settling all vital questions by informal consultations among themselves and placing only their agreed conclusions before the Governor at the formal meetings of the Cabinet.

But the British Power partly retrieved by the back-door what it had lost in front. At the time of the formation of the Ministries in the Congress Provinces, there was a landslide in the ranks of the Muslim Leaguers in favour of joining hands with the Congress. They were prepared to cooperate with the Congress as members of a Coalition Government in carrying out Congress policies so long as they were not required to sign the Congress pledge. The Congress would have liked to accommodate them but it was afraid of introducing into the fortress the Trojan horse of the Muslim Leaguers with the British influence ensconced in its belly. And so the Congress Ministries were formed without the Muslim League. This decision of the Congress High Command taken against Gandhiji's best judgment proved to be a tactical error of the first magnitude. The proferred hand which the Congress found itself compelled to reject, the British Power was but too glad firmly to grasp. No sooner had the Congress Ministries resigned in the Provinces in October, 1939, as a protest against declaring India at war without her consent, than Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, took advantage of it and announced that the return of the Congress to office would be conditional upon its entering into coalition with the League even in Provinces where the Congress commanded an absolute majority in the legislature. Further, by declaring that no political change would be made which had not the approval and consent of the Muslim League and the other minorities, he practically put the official seal and sanction on an anti-Congress coalition with the power to veto all political advance. Lord Linlithgow on 8th August, 1940, declared: "It goes without saying that they (His Majesty's

Government) could not contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of Government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in Indian national life. Nor could they be parties to coercion of such elements into submission to such a Government."

Thus, the three evils with which later the successor Labour Government and Lord Linlithgow's successors in office had to contend and contend in vain, viz., the establishment of parity between the minority and the majority, putting the *imprimatur* of the British Government on the disruption of India's political unity, and conceding to the minority the right to veto the political advance of the country except on its own terms, were brought into being by Lord Linlithgow during his term of office. As a record of sabotage of nationalism and democracy this perhaps stands unexcelled by any Viceroy before or after.

The Federal part of the Government of India Act of 1935, which would have introduced the principle of responsibility at the Centre, as it had been introduced in the Provinces, had always been a thorn in Jinnah's side. Lord Linlithgow accepted the Muslim League's demand to scrap it when, on the 11th September, 1939, he announced that preparations in connection with the introduction of Federation would remain in suspense during the pendency of the war. The announcement was hailed by Jinnah with a sigh of relief and the Working Committee of the Muslim League passed a resolution on the 18th September, appreciating the suspension, and expressing the hope that the Federal scheme would be abandoned completely.

The strong Indian nationalist stand *vis-a-vis* India's participation in the war had very much exasperated the Conservative Coalition Government in Great Britain under Churchill, and the diehard bureaucracy in India headed by Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, and they did everything in their power to help and strengthen the Muslim League to offset the Congress.

In Bengal, Fazlul Huq, who was heading a Coalition Ministry commanding the confidence of the Legislature, was forced to resign in March, 1943, on pain of dismissal, and a League Ministry under Nazimuddin was installed in its place. The Governor allowed Nazimuddin to strengthen his position by raising the number of Ministers to 13 with an equal number of Parliamentary Secretaries, whereas he had refused Fazlul Huq permission to expand his Cabinet of eight by the addition of two Scheduled Caste members.

In Sind, Allah Bux, a nationalist Muslim, who was heading the Provincial Ministry, was dismissed by the Governor in October, 1942, for returning his title of "Khan Bahadur" and "O.B.E." as a protest against British refusal to meet nationalist India's demand for freedom. The League leader in the Assembly was invited and helped by the Governor to form the Ministry.

In Assam, Rohini Kumar Chaudhury (Independent) claimed that he was in a position to form a Ministry but he was not invited to do so, but the League leader was asked by the Governor to form a Ministry in August, 1942.

The Muslim League, too, had kept out of the Viceroy's Executive Council[20] but, unlike the Congress, it was not because Britain did not give India independence but because it did not concede the communalist demand of the League forthwith. The League, however, cooperated with the war effort negatively by opposing the "Quit India" demand of the Congress which it denounced as an attempt to bully the British and to bypass the League. And so the two got along in close, tacit alliance.

Individual Leaguers continued to give vigorous support to the war effort. Some of the League members were among the most lavish subscribers to the British war fund and Muslims as a class reaped rich rewards—particularly in Provinces where Muslim League Ministries were in power—in the form of war contracts and war-time share in the distributive trades. This *nouveau riche* class provided further impetus and backing to the League's demand for Pakistan.

A theory began to be propounded by the British diehard constitutional pundits that the democratic principle of decisions by majority vote was not applicable to India as Hindus and Muslims were "disparate elements" and were not agreed on the "fundamental rules of the game". Therefore, the "right of self-determination" of the Muslims as a community should be recognised. A constitutional garb was provided to this undemocratic and reactionary move by the "two-nation" theory of the Muslim League. Top-ranking Conservatives like Winterton, Amery, Zetland and Churchill did their best by their utterances in Parliament and outside to put their *imprimatur* on and give currency to this theory. Said Mr. Amery in his speech on the 18th November, 1941: "Rightly or wrongly, the experience of the Provincial self-Government on British Parliamentary lines has convinced the Moslems . . . that they cannot submit to any central Government for India in which the executive is directly dependent on a Parliamentary majority, *which if Provincial experience is any guide would be an obedient mouthpiece of the Congress High Command.*" (Italics mine). The British Government also set the fashion of stigmatising the Congress as "Hindu"—though unlike the League its door was open to all, it had a large number of Muslims on its rolls, a Muslim as its President on more than one occasion, and Muslims as members of its executive—and "totalitarian" for enforcing upon its nominees in the legislatures party discipline on which the very fabric of the British Party system rests.

It might have been a curious coincidence but it is significant that it was shortly after Jinnah's interview with Lord Linlithgow early in 1940, during which the Viceroy urged that the Muslim League should

abandon its "negative attitude" and come out with "concrete proposals", that the Muslim League officially put forth its Pakistan demand in its Lahore resolution of March, 1940, on the basis of its two-nation theory. The operative part of this resolution ran:

No constitutional plan would be...acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principles, viz., that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary; that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the north-western and eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute independent States in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign.

Lord Linlithgow also adopted the steady policy of helping the League to consolidate its power and form Muslim League Ministries in the Provinces where Congress had resigned from office. Whereas at the beginning of the war there was not a single Muslim League Ministry in any of the Provinces, by the time Lord Linlithgow retired from his *gadi* in November, 1943, in all the four Provinces of Bengal, Assam, the North-West Frontier Province and Sind, which were claimed by the League for Pakistan, Muslim League Ministries had been established with the active support of the Viceroy.

A further step in this direction was taken when after the commencement of Gandhiji's fast in the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp in February, 1943, three of the Viceroy's Executive Councillors resigned as a protest against the Government's policy and fresh nominations were made by Lord Linlithgow to fill the vacancies. Commented *The New Statesman and Nation* on 8th May, 1943: "The newcomers are not an impressive team, but the most significant point about them is that the composition of the Council now realises Mr. Jinnah's ideal of parity in numbers, between Muslims and Hindus. When once this precedent is established, it will be claimed by the minority community as a vested right. This seems a reckless innovation."

The anti-British slogan was still kept up by the Muslim League. Otherwise it would have lost standing with the Muslim masses. But care was taken not to get "embroiled" with the British Power. The latter could very well afford to pay that price. The more strength the Muslim League could muster the more efficiently could it be used as a counterpoise to the Congress demand for independence.

For all that there was not any love lost between the British and the League and neither fully trusted the other. Both understood it was a marriage of convenience. For the time being they were indispensable to each other though for different reasons and not quite identical ends. The Muslim League supported the British Power in India. In return it had the British Power's support "in practice if not in pretence"[21] where the British needed the League's cooperation against the Congress, but

where the British could manage to hold their own without the League —as in the case of the Punjab—they resolutely kept the League at arm's length.

With increasing consciousness of its value to the British Power the League's intransigence grew. It insisted that before there could be any negotiations with the Congress for a settlement, the Congress must accept for itself the role of a Hindu communalist body, and must agree to recognise the Muslim League as the sole representative of the Indian Muslims and undertake not to recognise any Muslim who was not a member of the Muslim League. When this utterly impossible condition was not accepted, it adopted an air of offended generosity.

In 1935, before this *non-possumus* attitude had hardened into a rigid, unalterable condition, a communal pact was actually reached between Jinnah and Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the then Congress President. The Congress agreed to the pact, but the League later demanded that the Hindu Mahasabha—the Hindu communalist opposite number of the Muslim League—should also agree to it, and on the ground of the Mahasabha's non-adherence, the League repudiated the whole thing.

The Muslim League's claim that it represented all the Muslims of India could not be contested as the League refused to publish its membership figures. In the absence of disproof the British Government in practice accepted the claim.

Most of the League's propaganda was negative. It refused to define the nature of Pakistan that was to be and never tried to place the full picture of Pakistan either before the Muslims or those who were to concede it; it refused to define what Pakistan meant even geographically. The reason was patent. No matter how the boundaries of Pakistan were drawn, Muslims were so distributed all over India that a substantial portion of them would still be left behind. The League was well aware that if Pakistan were defined, "it would at once lose its attraction for the millions of Muslims who would then obviously be left out of its benefits."[22] Ultimately Pakistan was defined by division itself.

The fact was that the idea of Pakistan did not bear analysis, but it provided an excellent battle-cry. It had to be kept up as a bright and undefined ideal. And so, when Dr. Rajendra Prasad in a statement on 16th April, 1941, invited the League President to present the proposition in specific terms so that the Congress could discuss it, Jinnah contemptuously rejected the offer, saying that the "principle" of partitioning India must first be accepted by the Congress.

Previously the British used to claim that the framing of a constitution was Britain's special responsibility and they could not possibly abdicate it in favour of the Indians. But as soon as they found that the League could be depended upon to insist on conditions which the Congress could not concede without committing political suicide, they made prior agreement between the League and the Congress as a pre-condition

for discussing independence, and when the Congress could not accept that condition, they accused it of wanting power for itself. The League's intransigence thus became the British Power's trump card.

While there was a chance of maintaining their power in India, the British encouraged but did not identify themselves with the League's Pakistan demand. It was to be used mainly as a threat against Congress nationalism. But as the League became more and more conscious of its value to the British Power, it insisted on having its pound of flesh which the British were unwilling at that stage to yield. But for the time being each needed the other. "The forces represented by the League needed British support for their continued existence . . . imperialism in India needed the support of those forces."[23] And so the tacit alliance between the two continued in spite of the divergence of their aims and the resulting occasional jolts.

Remarked Mr. Arthur Moore, the editor of the European-owned Calcutta daily, *The Statesman*: "By insisting on the theoretical path of legal constitution-making by Indians themselves—and that, too, in war time of all times—His Majesty's Government has inevitably increased India's suspicion of its ultimate good faith."[24]

It was the growing evidence of this ugly reality that had led to the "Quit India" demand of the Congress. No wonder Jinnah regarded it as a move directed against the League and himself as, if successful, it would have taken away from him his bargaining counter with the Congress, viz. the veto on independence, which the presence of the British Power gave him.

Communalism is a vicious spiral. Once it is set going it takes care of itself. It calls into being counter communalism and the two act and react on each other with ever-increasing vehemence. That stage had not quite yet been reached. It is not improbable that firm and wise handling by the third party which had set it in motion, or in the alternative—if it had, as Gandhiji had diagnosed that it had, become morally incapable of it—its unconditional retirement from the scene in the spirit of the "Quit India" demand might have even at that stage stemmed the onward progress of communalism to the final disaster. As things stood in the year 1944, inside the British system the problem posed by the communal triangle defied all solution. Outside it, it would have had no existence.

3

It was in this political and historical background that the Gandhi-Jinnah talks of 1944 were held. Everybody except the British Power was weary of the political deadlock. Pressure on Jinnah both inside the League and outside had been growing to come to a settlement with the Congress in order to clear the way for independence.

There were widespread hopes and expectations in the country that something tangible would result from these talks. In an extraordinary

statement Jinnah called Gandhiji "Mahatma" and appealed for a period of political truce. "It has been the universal desire that we should meet. Now that we are going to meet, help us. We are coming to grips. Bury the past."[25]

The British Government felt genuinely perturbed by the prospect of a settlement. The Viceroy made it known on the eve of the meeting that "there must be . . . agreement in principle between Hindus and Muslims and all important elements"[26] before the British Government could think of even a transitional national Government with limited powers. It was followed by a leading article in the London *Times*: "No agreement between Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Jinnah, however satisfactory to their adherents, can materially advance political progress in India unless it takes into account wider interests . . . the anxiety of the depressed classes . . . the claims of the Princes. . . . "[27]

The announcement of the coming meeting angered a section of the Hindus, particularly the members of the Hindu Mahasabha. A batch of fanatical young men decided to prevent the meeting from taking place. In a letter to Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru I wrote:

> You must have seen in the papers a report of the doings of the (Hindu Mahasabha) picketers at Sevagram. . . . On the first day the leader of the batch had blurted out that this was only the first step and, if necessary, force would be used to prevent Bapu from going to meet Jinnah. Yesterday they gave intimation that they would physically prevent him from going out of the hut, and planted pickets at all the three exits leading out of the hut.
>
> This morning I had an intimation on the telephone from the District Superintendent of Police that they intended serious mischief, and, therefore, the police would be compelled to take action. Bapu had proposed to go all alone in their midst and proceed to Wardha (railway station) on foot unless they themselves changed their mind and asked him to get into the car. . . . Just before his departure, the D.S.P. came and said that he had arrested the picketers after giving them due notice, when all persuasion had failed. . . .
>
> The leader of the picketers appeared to be very highly strung, fanatical and of a neurotic type, which caused some anxiety. Searching of his person after arrest revealed a full-sized dagger.[28] When the police officer who arrested him banteringly remarked that at any rate he (the picketer) had had the satisfaction of becoming a martyr, quick came the reply, "No, that will be when someone assassinates Gandhiji." "Why not leave it to the leaders to settle it among themselves? For instance, Savarkar (the Hindu Mahasabha leader) might come and do the job," jocularly remarked the police officer in question. The reply was, "That will be too great an honour for Gandhiji. The *jamadar* will be quite enough for the purpose."

The person referred to as *jamadar* was his fellow-picketer—Nathuram Vinayak Godse. Three and a half years later the tragic prophecy was fulfilled.

A large number of Khaksars—a para-military Muslim organisation in imitation of Hitler's S.S. organisation based on the Fuehrer principle had swarmed into Bombay and were holding parades to create the proper "atmosphere" to stimulate a Congress-League settlement! The Communists were holding mass meetings which would "compel" the two leaders to unite in the defence of democracy as symbolised by Russian resistance to Nazi aggression. Fearing that Gandhiji was going to accept the League's demand for Pakistan, the Sikhs had come out with their demand for "Sikhistan"—a self-determining State in the Punjab—formed on "property basis", meaning obviously that areas where they had by their toil turned waste land into rich agricultural farms and in which the bulk of their landed property was located, should be constituted into a separate sovereign Sikh State. The Bombay police authorities by way of precaution promulgated an order prohibiting the use of "a certain number of roads and public places except by those persons who are resident in the locality surrounding those roads and by persons who genuinely need to visit those persons." To it Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah had added a characteristic announcement of his own: "Press representatives, I hope, will understand that obviously the meeting is not open to the Press and, therefore, I would request them not to take the trouble of coming to my house. . . . Photographers and film companies are at liberty to take photos and shots on the arrival of Mr. Gandhi."

A dramatic little interlude was provided when one day, while the talks were in progress, an officer of the Criminal Investigation Department came to Birla House and said that the Commissioner of police had sent him to look for Aruna Asaf Ali who would be coming to meet Gandhiji at night.

"What would you expect me to do in case she comes?" Gandhiji scribbled on a slip of paper.

"We understand she is coming to surrender herself to the police."

"But suppose she is not coming with a view to surrender?"

"Then we shall keep a sharp watch and do our duty. Even as it is we are on the alert. Our information is—she is actually in this house."

Gandhiji laughed: "I do not even know whether she is in Bombay."

The police officer thanked him: "I am sure you won't mislead us Mahatmaji!"

* * *

The talks with Jinnah began on the 9th September, 1944, and continued for 18 days at Jinnah's residence at 10, Mount Pleasant Road, Bombay. Gandhiji sent Jinnah special wheaten wafers that had been prepared for himself on Id day which fell during the talks. He also sent Jinnah his nature-cure doctor during the talks to give him curative massage.

They met, they shook hands, they embraced each other. There seemed to be a genuine human touch in their first meeting. Jinnah came

out into his porch to receive the Mahatma and to escort him back at the time of leaving and even posed with him to be photographed. Observers fancied they noticed in Jinnah's parting warm handshake more than a mere histrionic gesture. But that was all. At the very outset Jinnah questioned the representative capacity of the Mahatma but ultimately relented and agreed to continue the talks. As the talks progressed the truth began to peep through that there was going to be no give but only take. The Quaid-i-Azam had come not to be convinced or even to discuss; the objection had been waived only to give the "seeker" a chance to receive the light and join the band of the faithful!

"Have you brought anything from Jinnah?" Gandhiji was asked on his return. "Only flowers," was the Mahatma's laconic reply. Later he gave Rajaji the full story of their three-and-a-quarter hours' talk. It was "most disappointing":

"It was a test of my patience. . . . I am amazed at my own patience. However, it was a friendly talk.

"His (Jinnah's) contempt for your formula (Rajaji formula) and his contempt for you is staggering. You rose in my estimation that you could have talked to him for all those hours and that you should have taken the trouble to draw up that formula.

"He says you have accepted his demand and so should I. I said, 'I endorse Rajaji's formula and you can call it Pakistan if you like.' He talked of the Lahore resolution. I said, 'I have not studied it and I do not want to talk about it. Let us talk about Rajaji's formula and you can point out any flaws that you find there.'

"In the middle of the talk he came back to the old ghost: 'I thought you had come here as a Hindu, as a representative of the Hindu Congress.' I said, 'No, I have come here neither as a Hindu nor as a representative of the Congress. I have come here as an individual. You can talk to me as an individual or as the President of the League, whichever way you prefer. If you had agreed with Rajaji and accepted his formula, you and he would have gone before your respective organisations and pleaded with them to accept it. That is why Rajaji came to you. You would then have placed it before other parties, too, in the same way. Now you and I have to do it.' He said he was the President of the League. Where was the basis for a talk if I was there representing nobody except myself? Who was to deliver the goods? I was the same man as he had found me in 1939. There was no change in me. I almost felt like saying, 'Yes, I am the same man and since you think it is no use talking to me, I will go away.' But I resisted the temptation. I told him, 'Is not it worth your while to convert an individual? I am the same man no doubt. You can change my views if you can and I will support you wholeheartedly.' 'Yes, I know, if I can convert you, you will be my Ali,' he said."

"It was a most revealing remark," Gandhiji observed afterwards. "I was meeting the prophet of Pakistan looking for his Ali!"

But to continue with Gandhiji's narrative:

"He said I should concede Pakistan and he would go the whole length with me. He would go to jail, he would even face bullets. I said, 'I will stand by your side to face them.' 'You may not,' he said. 'Try me,' I replied.

"We came back to the formula. He wants Pakistan now, not after independence. 'We will have independence for Pakistan and Hindustan,' he said. 'We should come to an agreement and then go to the Government and ask them to accept it, force them to accept our solution.' I said I could never be a party to that. I could never ask the Britishers to impose partition on India. 'If you all want to separate, I can't stop you. I have not got the power to compel you and I would not use it if I had.' He said, 'The Muslims want Pakistan. The League represents the Muslims and it wants separation.' I said, 'I agree the League is the most powerful Muslim organisation. I might even concede that you as its President represent the Muslims of India, but that does not mean that all Muslims want Pakistan. Put it to the vote of all the inhabitants of the area and see.' He said, 'Why should you ask non-Muslims?' I said, 'You cannot possibly deprive a section of the population of its vote. You must carry them with you, and if you are in the majority why should you be afraid?' I told him of what Kiron Shankar Roy had said to me: 'If the worst comes to the worst, we in Bengal will all go in Pakistan, but for goodness' sake do not partition Bengal. Do not vivisect it.'

" 'If you are in majority,' I said, 'you will have your choice. I know it is a bad thing for you, but if you want it all the same, you will have it. But that will be an adjustment between you and me. It cannot occur while the Britishers are here.'

"He began to cross-examine me on the various clauses of the formula. I said to him, 'If you want clarification of those things, is not it better to have it from the author of the formula?' 'Oh, no.' He did not want that. I said, 'What is the use of your cross-examining me?' He recollected himself. 'Oh, no. I am not cross-examining you,' and then added: 'I have been a lawyer all my life and my manner may have suggested that I was cross-examining you.' I asked him to reduce to writing his objections to the formula. He was disinclined. 'Must I do so?' he asked. 'Yes, I would like you to.' He agreed.

"In the end he said, 'I would like to come to an agreement with you.' I answered, 'You remember what I have said, that we should meet not to separate till we had come to an agreement.' He said, yes, he agreed. I suggested, 'Should we put that also in our statement?' He said, 'No, better not. Nevertheless that will be the understanding between us and the cordiality and friendliness of our talk will be reflected in our public utterances, too.' "

Rajaji: "Do you think he wants a settlement?"

Gandhiji: "I am not certain. He thought he probably did."

Rajaji: "Then you will get it through."

Gandhiji: "Yes. . . . If the right word comes to me."

The next day they did not meet. Jinnah said, it was "the twenty-first day of Ramzan, a very important day for all Muslims." A former colleague of Jinnah remarked: "Why did he not say it was Sunday and he wanted a holiday? He understands Sunday better than Ramzan!"

The talks were resumed in the evening on the 11th September. The Mahatma had his evening meal in the middle of their conversation at Jinnah's residence. A bottle of boiled water was included in his tiffin basket. Lest anyone should think that the Mahatma was using holy Ganges water or something like that when dining in a Muslim house, Gandhiji gave instructions that the water bottle was not to be sent along thereafter any more.

The wooing on the part of Quaid-i-Azam continued on the 12th September. Let me again describe it in Gandhiji's own words:

"He drew a very alluring picture of the Government of Pakistan. It would be a perfect democracy. I asked him if he had not told me that democracy did not suit Indian conditions. He did not remember it. He asked me to tell him what he had said. So I told him all that and said that I might have misunderstood him. In that case he should correct me. But when I repeated in detail what he had said, he could not say no. He said, yes, he had said that, but that was with regard to imposed democracy.

"Then he said, 'Do you think it is a question of religious minority with us?' I said, 'Yes'. If not, he should tell me what it was. He harangued. I won't repeat all that here. I asked him what would happen to other minorities in Pakistan: Sikhs, Christians, Depressed Classes etc. He said they would be part of Pakistan. I asked him if he meant joint electorates. He knew I was coming to it. He said, yes, he would like them to be a part of the whole. He would explain the advantages of joint electorates, but if they wanted separate electorates they would have it. Sikhs would have Gurumukhi if they wanted and the Pakistan Government would give them financial aid. I asked, 'What about Jats?' At first he poohpoohed the idea. Then he said, 'If they want it, they will also have it. They will have separate existence if they want it.' I said, 'What about Christians? They also want some place where they are in a majority and where they can rule, as for instance in Travancore?' He said that was a problem for the Hindus. I said supposing Travancore was in Pakistan? He said he would give it to them. He cited the instance of Newfoundland. The rest of the talk was nothing. I am to continue exploring his mind."

Rajaji: "Find out what he wants."

Gandhiji: "Yes, that is what I am doing. I am to prove from his own mouth that the whole of the Pakistan proposition is absurd. I

think he does not want to break. On my part I am not going to be in a hurry. But he can't expect me to endorse an undefined Pakistan."

Rajaji: "Do you think he will give up the claim?"

Gandhiji: "He has to, if there is to be a settlement. He wants a settlement, but what he wants he does not know. I want to show him that your formula is the only thing that he can reasonably ask for."

From the 9th to the 13th September was the period of subdued optimism, so far as the outside world was concerned. Then the hope began to wilt. From the 14th to the 19th—when Quaid-i-Azam in his Id day message dwelt on the advance of the Muslims "as a nation" and instead of striking a note of friendship or goodwill indulged in a tirade against "renegades of the Millat, who are blocking our progress"—covered the phase of growing pessimism. From then onward it was a steep decline, culminating in the complete breakdown on the 27th September.

The whole period was marked by an exchange of letters—the queerest correspondence that perhaps ever covered a period of friendly negotiations. The correspondence and the talks never converged but ran a parallel course and were conducted, as it were, in different tongues. "The talks are to get round you and the correspondence is in anticipation of the failure," was Rajaji's shrewd comment.

Gandhiji started from the position that his life mission was Hindu-Muslim unity. Therefore, he was prepared to accept, if the Muslims so desired, the substance of the Muslim League's demand as put forth in the Lahore resolution, viz., self-determination for areas where the Muslims were in a majority. But it was obvious that self-determination could not be exercised in the absence of freedom. Therefore, the League and all other groups composing India should agree to combine in the first instance to achieve independence by their joint effort.[29]

Jinnah said this was like "putting the cart before the horse". Joint action for achieving independence could follow, not precede, a settlement with the League.[30]

Gandhiji maintained that unless they ousted the third party, they could not live at peace with one another. But he was ever ready to make an effort "to find ways and means of establishing a living peace between us". That was why he had given his approval to the Rajaji formula. It embodied the substance of the demand put forth in the Lahore resolution, and gave it shape.[31]

Jinnah objected. The Rajaji formula required the Muslim League to endorse the demand for independence on the basis of a united India.[32]

Gandhiji explained that it was not on the basis of a united India. "If we come to a settlement . . . we reach by joint effort independence for India as it stands. India, become free, will proceed to demarcation, plebiscite and partition, if the people concerned vote for partition." Was that not the substance of self-determination?[33]

Jinnah proceeded to show where the Rajaji formula fell short of it. Who would appoint the Commission for demarcating areas and who would decide the form of the plebiscite and franchise contemplated by the formula? Who would give effect to the verdict of the plebiscite?[34]

Gandhiji: "The Provisional Interim Government, unless we decide it now."[35]

Jinnah asked: What was the basis on which the Provisional National Government was to be formed?[36]

Gandhiji replied, that would have to be agreed to between the League and the Congress. Naturally, if they could agree on some basis, it would be for them to consult other parties.[37]

That did not satisfy Jinnah. He wanted a definite outline if Gandhiji had any. Since it was Gandhiji's formula, he said, he must have thought it out.[38]

Gandhiji explained that he had not come with any. But if Jinnah had one in connection with the Lahore resolution "which also I presume requires an Interim Government" they could discuss it.[39]

That led them to the Lahore resolution.

Why did not Gandhiji accept the Lahore resolution since he (Gandhiji) had said that the Rajaji formula conceded in substance the demand embodied in the Lahore resolution?

Gandhiji put forth his difficulty. The Lahore resolution was vague and indefinite. The "Pakistan" word was not in it, nor did it contain any reference to the "two-nation" theory. If the basis of the League's Pakistan demand was religious, then was Pan-Islam its ultimate goal since all the Muslims of the world constituted one community? If, on the other hand, Pakistan was to be confined to Indian Muslims alone, would Jinnah explain what it was that distinguished an Indian Muslim from every other Indian, if not his religion? Was he different from a Turk or an Arab?[40]

Jinnah replied that Pan-Islam was a mere bogey. The word "Pakistan", he admitted, did not occur in the Lahore resolution, nor was it used by him or the League in its original sense.[41] "The word has now become synonymous with the Lahore resolution. . . . We maintain and hold that Muslims and Hindus are two major nations by any definition or test of a nation." Muslims were a separate nation by virtue of their "distinctive culture and civilisation, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of value and proportion, legal laws and moral codes, customs and calendar, history and tradition", and, therefore, they were entitled to a separate, sovereign existence in a homeland of their own.[42]

This was like "Alice in Wonderland" logic. Everyone of these statements was contrary to fact or at best a half-truth. Urdu, "the language of the Muslims", their culture, art, architecture were all the product of synthesis. Muslims in East Bengal understood and spoke Bengali

only, in the South Tamil, Telugu, or Malayalam. In Bihar villages it was impossible to distinguish a Muslim woman from a Hindu woman from her dress. Even some of their customs bore the stamp of the same process. Instances could be multiplied of Muslims who bore Hindu names and of others who, since their conversion from Hinduism, had retained their Hindu surname like Pandit, Roy, Chowdhury, Mazumdar and so on.

"Mere assertion is no proof," protested Gandhiji.[43]

Jinnah recommended to Gandhiji a couple of books, one of them written by a Muslim League theoretician for perusal. Gandhiji painstakingly and conscientiously studied their pages. It did not help. "It contains half-truths and its conclusions or inferences are unwarranted."[44]

Were the people in the regions falling under the Lahore resolution to have any voice in the matter of separation and, if so, how was it to be ascertained? he asked Jinnah.[45]

Jinnah: "The right of self-determination, which we claim, postulates that we are a nation and as such it would be the self-determination of the Muslims, and they alone are entitled to exercise that right."[46]

What about the Muslims who have expressed dissent from the policy of the League? Should not their doubts be removed? Or, are they practically to be disfranchised?[47]

"The Muslim League is the only authoritative and representative organisation of Muslims in India."[48]

That was enough. Gandhiji pleaded with Jinnah to consider how the "independent States" envisaged by him would materially and otherwise be benefited by being split up and whether independent States would not become a menace to themselves and to the rest of India.[49] Jinnah's inflexible reply was that this was the only solution of the Indian problem and the price India must pay for its independence.[50]

Pakistan had hitherto appeared before them heavily veiled. Now for the first time its lineaments were exposed to view and lo and behold, it did not present a very attractive figure! "The more our argument progresses, the more alarming your picture appears to me," wrote Gandhiji to Jinnah on the 15th September, at the end of the first week of their talks. "As I . . . imagine the working of the (Lahore) resolution in practice, I see nothing but ruin for the whole of India."

The discussion thereafter, on Jinnah's part, entered upon an acrimonious phase. He even took exception to Gandhiji saying that though he represented nobody, he aspired "to represent all the inhabitants of India" because he realised in his own person "their misery and degradation which is their common lot irrespective of class, caste or creed."[51]

This was too much for the Quaid-i-Azam. Although he could go as far as to admit that Gandhiji was "a great man", who was exercising enormous influence over the Hindus, "particularly the masses", he could not accept his statement that he aspired to represent all inhabitants. "It

is quite clear that you represent nobody but the Hindus, and as long as you do not realise your true position . . . it is very difficult for me to argue with you."[52]

"Why can you not accept that I aspire to represent all the sections that compose the people of India?" pleaded Gandhiji. "Do you not aspire? Should not every Indian? That the aspiration may never be realised is beside the point."[53]

Jinnah insisted that Gandhiji should accept the "basis and fundamental principles" adumbrated in the Lahore resolution. Gandhiji pleaded with him: Was that not unnecessary since he had accepted "the concrete consequence" that should follow from such acceptance in as far as it was reasonable and practicable? "I cannot accept the Lahore resolution as you want me to, especially when you seek to introduce into its interpretation theories and claims which I cannot accept and which I cannot ever hope to induce India to accept."[54]

"Can we not agree," Gandhiji finally pleaded, "to differ on the question of 'two-nations' and yet solve the problem on the basis of self-determination?"[55]

The basis of his offer was that India was not to be regarded as the home of two or more nations but as one family consisting of many members of whom the one, namely Muslims, living in certain parts in absolute majority, desired to live in separation from the rest of India. "If the regions holding Muslim majorities have to be separated according to the Lahore resolution, the grave step of separation should be specifically placed before and approved by the people in that area."[56] Differing from the general basis proposed by the Muslim League of the "two-nation" theory, he said, he could yet recommend to the Congress and the country acceptance of the claim for separation of those parts. If the majority of all the adult population of those parts voted in favour of separation, those areas would be formed into a separate State as soon as India was free.

This he called "division as between two brothers". Children of the same family, dissatisfied with one another by reason of change of religion, if they wished, could separate, but then the separation would be within themselves and not separation in the face of the whole world. "When two brothers separate, they do not become enemies one of the other in the eyes of the world. The world would still recognise them as brothers."[57]

Whilst, therefore, the two parts might agree to live separately, Gandhiji proposed that the treaty of separation should also provide for the efficient and satisfactory administration of matters of common concern, i.e., defence, foreign affairs, internal communications, customs, commerce and the like, and terms for safeguarding the rights of minorities in the two States. Immediately on the acceptance of the aforesaid agreement by the Congress and the League the two would decide on a

common course of action for the attainment of independence. The League would, however, be free to remain out of any direct action to which the Congress might resort and in which the League might not be willing to participate.[58]

But Jinnah did not want separation on the basis of a plebiscite in which all the inhabitants affected by it could participate; he wanted the issue to be decided on the basis of "self-determination" confined to the Muslims alone. "We claim the right of self-determination as a nation. . . . You are labouring under the wrong idea that 'self-determination' means only that of 'a territorial unit'. . . . Ours is a case of division and carving out two independent sovereign States by way of settlement between two major nations, Hindus and Muslims, and not of severance or secession *from any existing union*, which is *non est* in India."[59]

"I find no parallel in history for a body of converts and their descendants claiming to be a nation apart from the parent stock," wrote Gandhiji to Jinnah on the 15th September. "If India was one nation before the advent of Islam, it must remain one in spite of the change of faith of a very large body of her children. . . . You seem to have introduced a new test of nationhood. If I accept it, I would have to subscribe to many more claims and face an insoluble problem."

In reply to Gandhiji's question as to what provision for defence and similar matters of "common concern" he contemplated under the Lahore resolution, he replied: "There cannot be defence and similar matters of 'common concern' when it is accepted that Pakistan and Hindustan will be two separate, independent sovereign States", except by treaty between the two.[60]

While Gandhiji was prepared to let the Muslim majority areas separate if they wanted, even after their experience of working together in the Provisional Interim Government under the Rajaji formula, or in pursuance of the common line of action for the achievement of independence under his proposal, provided that at the same time they entered into a treaty for satisfactory administration of defence and other matters of "common concern" to both the parts regarded as a whole, Jinnah wanted separation to come first and a treaty for the safeguarding of "common interest" to India afterwards, on such terms as the two parts might agree to or if they could agree. This, as the Congress President Maulana Azad put it, was like "divorce before marriage"!

What would happen if one or the other broke the treaty, if there was nothing left as of "joint" concern? The reply was that the "consequence would be what has happened throughout the world all along up till now, i.e., war."[61] In other words, Jinnah wanted recognition of the freedom of the Pakistan areas to enter into a combination hostile to India or even to make war upon her. This freedom, as Gandhiji pointed out, could not be had by *agreement*.

He had agreed to separation on the basis of members of a family desiring severance of the family tie in matters of conflict, wrote Gandhiji to Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru afterwards, explaining his talks with Jinnah, "but not in all matters so as to become enemies one of the other, *as if there was nothing common between the two except enmity*."[62] (Italics mine).

"We seem to be moving in a circle," he wrote to Jinnah on the 22nd September.

The next day, 23rd September, marked a crucial point in the talks. As Gandhiji was proceeding to Jinnah's residence for the meeting, Lady Emily Kinnaird—a "hot gospeller"—his "mother" whose one concern was that her "son" should accept Jesus Christ as the "only son of God" (Lady Emily: "He, Jesus, was the son of God." Gandhiji: "And so are we." Lady Emily: "No. He was the only son of God and without receiving Him in our hearts we cannot be saved.") accompanied him some way to bless his efforts.

In a note to Jinnah that day, Gandhiji wrote: "Last evening's talk has left a bad taste in the mouth." And again on the 26th September: "You keep on saying that I should accept certain theses which you call the basis and fundamental principles of the Lahore resolution, while I have been contending that the best way for us who differ in our approach to the problem is to give body to the demand as it stands in the resolution and work it out to our mutual satisfaction."

But Jinnah refused even to discuss Gandhiji's proposal. "You repeat that if you and I can agree upon a common course of action, you may use what influence you possess for its acceptance by the Congress and the country. I have already stated from the very beginning that that is not enough."[63]

He had agreed to "receive" the Mahatma because, as the Mahatma had said, he had come as a seeker of light and knowledge and, "if I can convert you, exercising as you do tremendous influence over Hindu India, it will be of no small assistance to me."[64] But he was not prepared to discuss counter proposals for an agreement with one who was not an accredited representative armed with full authority. "(While) . . . we confined ourselves to the Lahore resolution . . . the question of your representative capacity did not arise. . . . Now you have . . . made a new proposal of your own on your own basis . . . and it is difficult to deal with it any further unless it comes from you in your representative capacity."[65]

"Your constant references to my not being clothed with representative authority are really irrelevant," replied Gandhiji. "If you break, it cannot be because I have no representative capacity or because I have been unwilling to give you satisfaction in regard to the claim embodied in the Lahore resolution."[66]

When the matter had thus reached the breaking point, Gandhiji suggested that he should be allowed to meet the Muslim League Council

to make them see the reasonableness of his proposals. "Do not take, I pray, the responsibility of rejecting the offer. Throw it on your Council. Give me an opportunity of addressing them. If they feel like rejecting it I would like you to advise the Council to put it before the open session of the League. If you will accept my advice and permit me I would attend the open session and address it."[67]

As an alternative, he suggested that the issue might be put to arbitration. "Is it irrelevant or inadmissible to supplement our efforts to convince each other with outside help, guidance, advice or even arbitration?" he asked. If they were bent on reaching an agreement, all these approaches were there to make use of.

But none of these suggestions was acceptable to Jinnah. "It is a most extraordinary and unprecedented suggestion to make. Only a member or delegate is entitled to participate in the deliberations of the meeting of the Council or in the open session."[68]

It is not considered either "extraordinary" or "unprecedented" even for a sovereign Parliament to invite leaders and statesmen of another friendly country to come and address its members. Why was Jinnah so chary of allowing any contact to develop between Gandhiji and the Muslim League Council if his object was to explore avenues for a settlement between Hindus and Muslims? Was it because he was afraid that they might see reason where he had refused to? Or did he think that the more the members of his camp were protected from the "corrupting" influence of the Mahatma, the easier it would be for him to manage them as a docile body? It is curious that when once during the negotiations I invited the members of Jinnah's personal staff to tea and a friendly chat with the members of Gandhiji's party, I received the following reply from his Secretary: "I am . . . sorry to inform you that it will not be possible for us to accept your kind invitation . . . till the present talks are over."

The following from my diary under the date 24th September, 1944, gives the story of the final breakdown of the talks:

"On his return at 7.10 p.m. Bapu spoke to Rajaji and then again after prayers. Jinnah had refused even to discuss Bapu's proposal, as he (Bapu) was not vested with authority; he represented nobody. 'If you want defence and so many things in common, that means that you visualise a centre?' 'No, but I must say, in practice there will have to be a body selected by both parties to regulate these things.'

"Then he came to the August (1942) resolution. He said, it was inimical to Muslims. 'But don't you see that it is absolutely a baseless charge? With all the legal acumen that is attributed to you, why cannot you see that it deals with only India and the British rule? It has nothing to do with the Muslims. You can refer the matter to a lawyer of eminence impersonally and take his opinion whether there is anything in it which could be considered inimical to the Muslim League or the Muslims.'

"He said he did not need to do so. 'Why should I want another's opinion when I know it for myself?' 'I broached the subject that I had fixed up to be at Sevagram on the 2nd October. I would like to leave on the 30th and would be back in 4 or 5 days.' He said, 'Why must we take so long? We had better close up now. I will have everything ready (the reference was to their correspondence) on Tuesday. You will examine the copies and I will do so.' He had the introduction also ready and read it out. 'I said, I had nothing to say against it, but if I had a copy I could examine it. He said I could do so on Tuesday. I said, all right. He would not have a third party, nor would he produce his own scheme. He condemned the August resolution. He suggested in so many words that amends should be made, i.e., it should be retracted.' "

Reporting the failure of the talks at a largely attended evening prayer meeting, on the 27th September, Gandhiji said that although the result he was hoping for had not materialised, he had no sense of disappointment or despondency. He was convinced that even out of that breakdown good would result. He had tried his best, he went on to explain, to go as far as he could to meet Jinnah's viewpoint for the common good of all. He had knocked at the Quaid-i-Azam's door, but he had failed. It was not, however, for a votary of truth and non-violence, to feel despondent if his effort at times failed to yield the result aimed at. It was not for them to question God's ways. God alone knew what was best for them.

"All the parties and especially the members of the Muslim League should ask the Quaid-i-Azam to revise his opinion," Gandhiji said in a Press statement the next day. "If Rajaji and I have stultified the Lahore resolution we should be educated."

"I believe Mr. Jinnah is sincere, but I think he is suffering from hallucination when he imagines that an unnatural division of India could bring either happiness or prosperity to the people concerned," he remarked in an interview to Mr. Gelder of the *News Chronicle*.

Their talks had only been adjourned *sine die*, Gandhiji explained to another group of pressmen. "I am convinced that Mr. Jinnah is a good man. I hope we shall meet again. . . . In the meantime it is the duty of the public to digest the situation and bring the pressure of their opinion upon us."

4

"How could Gandhiji give his approval to the Rajaji formula and how dared he concede the principle of Pakistan? Had he not called the partition proposal an untruth and India's vivisection a sin?" some critics asked. Gandhiji explained that what he had agreed to was not different from the self-determination principle to which the Congress Working Committee was committed.[69] It implied conceding the right to

separate to such areas as might want it, after ascertaining the wishes of the inhabitants of that area through a properly conducted plebiscite, consistently with the safety, integrity and economic progress of the country as a whole. What his proposal as well as the Rajaji formula ruled out was freedom to indulge in acts of mutual hostility. It was that which he had called a sin.

The special machinery for the administration of matters of common concern to the two parts, which he had postulated, would not form part of the constitution but would be brought into being by a treaty between the two States and would be written into the charter of separation. His proposal was not acquiescence in carving-up India, but a bold experiment for forging bonds of voluntary and enduring union. His habit of getting behind labels, catchwords and slogans to achieve the desired result through seeming contraries was in full evidence during Gandhi-Jinnah talks. It provided an excellent example of the dialectical method —so deeply ingrained in the Gita and the Upanishads—which enables the Satyagrahi in the practice of Satyagraha to achieve a reconciliation through integration of opposite viewpoints.

What, if after separation under his formula, Pakistan refused to abide by the treaty? Gandhiji admitted that there was no guarantee against bad faith; there could be none. But the guilty party in that event, in the jurisprudence of the world, would have lost its position and become a mere nameless anomaly, like a woman, to use Churchill's picturesque expression in another connection, who had lost her marriage lines. The risk of bad faith, therefore, had to be taken. It was inseparable from existence under complete independence. The fabric of independence could not be raised on a foundation of fear.

The Rajaji formula conceded the essence of the League's demand, in so far as it was reasonable, said Gandhiji. He did not mind if it was given the name "Pakistan". But since Jinnah had characterised it as "a parody or negation" and an attempt to torpedo the Muslim League's Lahore resolution of March, 1940, he felt it necessary to understand the basis of Jinnah's objection. If the League's demand, which it called "Pakistan", was not full sovereignty minus only the "agreement" to wage war, or avoidance of measures detrimental to both parts regarded as a whole, then what was Pakistan? If the object was to create a unit where there would be the fullest scope for the development of Muslim religion and culture and for the expression of the talents and personality of the leaders of the Muslim community, without being overshadowed by more outstanding talent which they feared in undivided India, his formula would give full satisfaction. If, on the other hand, the plan was to use "Pakistan" as a fulcrum for employing Sudetenland tactics against India, it would not lend itself to that use.

He had the highest regard for Jinnah's single-mindedness, his great ability and integrity which nothing could buy. Surely, Jinnah—the

patriot—would not insist on freedom to engage in a fratricidal war or to do things that would weaken the two parts taken as a whole economically or in regard to defence. That was why he had knocked at his door, presented his cards to him for examination and entreated him to produce his without any mental reservation.

But he had to contend against loaded dice. "The correspondence makes clear," wrote Dr. M. R. Jayakar, the eminent jurist and Liberal leader from Maharashtra, to Gandhiji, "that any day, Mr. Jinnah would prefer a settlement with the British rather than with his own countrymen. . . . He will use this formula as a bargaining counter with the British Government and also as the starting point in future negotiations with Indian leaders."[70]

CHAPTER V

THE CHANGING SCENE

1

MILLIONS IN India and even outside had looked forward to Gandhi-Jinnah talks as the beginning of a new chapter in Hindu-Muslim relationship. The talks failed, because, as Gandhiji put it, "a mind enslaved cannot act as if it were free."[1] His experience of the three weeks' negotiations had further confirmed him in his view that the presence of the third party, i.e., the British, hindered the solution of the communal problem. As the prospect of presenting the demand for a National Government with the Muslim League's cooperation faded away, the question again began to occupy Gandhiji's thoughts: What next?

The death of millions as a result of starvation during the Bengal famine was not due so much to the scarcity of food as to the unbelievable corruption and callousness in the administration as well as outside. Middlemen, petty traders, and big merchants had not hesitated to make money at the cost of human lives. Unofficial and official exploitation proceeded side by side. Indeed, without the latter the former would not have been possible.[2]

"From top to bottom, the whole system is corrupt," remarked Gandhiji in deep anguish. "The Government connives at unofficial corruption. If the nation had control of the Government, this brutal bribery and corruption would not be tolerated for a single day. An adequate parallel for it will be found, if it can at all be found, in the era of Clive and Warren Hastings only. A National Government, having the confidence of the people, alone can tackle this problem. But there seems to be no prospect of it in sight. Intoxicated by the vision of victory the authorities have simply ceased to care."

The organised violence and slaughter of truth which the war symbolised oppressed him. The war was drawing to its close, but instead of passing away as the memory of an evil dream, it promised to stand out as a lasting monument of senseless carnage, vain dreams and blasted hopes. Victory under the circumstances, Gandhiji clearly saw, instead of inaugurating peace would only mark a stage in the preparation for another war.

Muriel Lester, that noble Englishwoman, who had been his host in the East End in London during the Second Round Table Conference, in one of her letters referred to the tragedy of "everything you and

I hold most precious . . . being desecrated before our eyes day after day. . . . To whatever spot on earth mind and memory turn, there the people are involved in tragedy. It is equally obvious that depreciation is at work in the imponderable unseen values that keep men sane in body, mind and spirit." Her letter concluded: "Yet God exists—is the only reality—is with us all—has perfect wisdom and is Truth and Power."

"Certainly God exists and the strife will end and peace settle one day on our weary earth," Gandhiji cogitated. But what consolation would that be to India or to England, if the former was excluded from its benefits and it came in spite of the latter? "Freedom after victory" was a misleading slogan. As Captain Liddell Hart had pithily observed, if the war was won by the sacrifice of freedom and all human values, at the end of it there might be nothing left to win the war for.

How was he to demonstrate the efficacy of non-violence and relieve the agony of the suffering millions in the circumstances? He had claimed that non-violence was always more than a match for the forces of violence, however well organised. At the beginning of the war, some English friends had written to him asking how individual pacifists could fight the spreading wave of violence and bloodshed. He had suggested fasting as one of the remedies. Some had laughed at the suggestion but he had stuck to it. The time had come for him to test that remedy in his own case and demonstrate its efficacy. That was the only way in which he could rouse the conscience of mankind.

Friends and coworkers tried to argue with him. He had just presented to them his enlarged and revitalised programme of constructive work. Would not the great wave of emotion, which his fast would set up, disturb the "peace and tranquillity" in which many of them were settling down to work?

"But that is just what I want," replied Gandhiji. "I do not want you or anybody else 'to settle down' to anything. In the midst of this frightful triple slaughter of soldiers, civilians and truth, it is impossible to settle down to anything. One has ceaselessly to be on the march body and soul. My business is to stir up myself and my surroundings and shake us out of our complacency."

What reason had he to think that his fast would compel the people to think instead of paralysing their thinking?

While it might be presumptuous on the part of a puny individual like himself to think, he replied, that his fast would galvanise the people, it was his faith that he had not striven all those years in vain to live a life of truth and non-violence, that gave him the right to speak through his fast. "Today millions are experiencing the pangs of hunger in passive helplessness. Even a small fraction of this suffering undergone willingly and with knowledge could change the face of the situation. How can I speak to these millions, or identify myself with them, without taking this fast and knowing myself what pangs of hunger mean?" He could not

point to any single thing in explanation of his urge to fast, he said, but the whole situation in its totality overwhelmed him. "The amazing thing is that I still survive and can feel the joy of living. I can do so because I know the joy of dying. Because I know that joy and grief are the obverse and reverse of the same coin, I remain unaffected by either and act as God bids me." To his English Quaker friend Carl Heath he wrote: "I am in the midst of a raging fire and often hum to myself: Rock of Ages cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee."[3]

"Must you speak through the pangs of hunger? Is there no other method?"

"There are many. They are for you to adopt. I must use mine, which I hold as a special gift from God to appeal to the heart and soul of the people."

The friends were not satisfied. What guarantee was there that if anything happened to him as a result, it would not let loose a storm with none left to control it?

"That may happen," replied Gandhiji. "I do not want it. But I would face that risk if the upshot of living a conscious life of truth and non-violence for over half a century is that India, too, has to go through a bloodbath."

"Why should you not in that case invite the risk of chaos in pursuit of non-violence while you are there in the flesh to control it?" the friends returned to the charge.

"Because I do not *want* anarchy or chaos," replied Gandhiji. "I must work for orderliness, not anarchy. But if in that attempt anarchy comes in my way, I would not be deterred by it. The world is thrilled by the reckless bravery of the Japanese. Far greater courage and bravery are expected of non-violence in this juncture if the law of the jungle is to be replaced by the law of love."

* * *

Where persuasion of friends had failed nature stepped in.

Gandhiji had been burning his candle at both ends in a reckless blaze. He had never fully recovered from the amœbic dysentery which he had brought with him from the prison. To control it, he had to cut down his food to the minimum. Extreme exhaustion followed as a result of slow starvation. On top of it, he had a bad attack of cold with bronchial cough and pain in the chest. He offered himself to be treated for it, more as a human guinea-pig than as a patient, by an Ayurvedic physician who had treated Kasturba Gandhi during her last illness in prison with great devotion. The physician prescribed a non-medicinal preparation containing a lot of almonds. It caused a digestive upset. After a dose of castor oil, which he had administered to himself to get over it, one day he fainted and was saved from falling only by the timely presence of an Ashram inmate. Rajaji happened to arrive in the Ashram soon after. He was as little enamoured of Gandhiji launching on a fast as

anybody else. With his matchless persuasive skill, he prevailed upon him to substitute abstention from all work—a "work-fast"—for a physical fast, for one month.

Gandhiji had once remarked: "In the course of self-examination, I often ask myself whether the terrific strain to which I subject my system in pursuit of my mission is a sign of self-will or a mark of His grace. The test is this: If I break down under the strain, it was the result of self-will, attachment, impatience for results; but if my labour was solely in pursuance of His will, His grace should be with me and I should be able to bear up under the strain."

The breakdown in the present case was an adverse sign. It indicated a lack of detachment or absence of complete self-surrender, which is the essential condition for one who aspires to become a vehicle of His purpose. So he laid aside all the conclusions of his cold reason and his own strong personal inclination to undertake a fast, and reversing his first decision in all humility put himself completely under the guidance of the "inner voice".

All papers, files etc., were accordingly removed from Gandhiji's hut to make his surroundings commensurate with the spirit of his resolve. Even newspapers were banished. He did spinning for one hour daily and carding of cotton with fingers (*tunai*) for another half an hour. For the rest he observed complete silence, carrying on conversation whenever absolutely necessary by writing slips. By way of recreation, whenever he felt like it, he turned over the pages of any book that he had a fancy for —one was Patanjali's *Yogasutra*, the other an Urdu book. When he had picked up sufficient strength, he paid visits on foot to some neighbouring villages, where constructive activities were in progress, and to the *samadhi* of the late Seth Jamnalal Bajaj (his "fifth son" and "half trustee" of his possessions in terms of the Gandhian ideal of trusteeship) and to the members of the Bajaj family. But sometimes trifling "domestics" of the Ashram got the better of his resolve and threatened to make his rest more strenuous than work. Rajaji's presence on such occasions proved to be a godsend.

In spite of his detachment, which he had cultivated to a very high degree, Gandhiji was very human and the value of the presence near him of someone from among his old guard like Rajaji was not to be overestimated. In my diary under the date 6th December, 1944, I find the following: "There is something frightening in Bapu's utter spiritual isolation. In a measure it is inseparable from greatness. But surely something could be done to mitigate it. . . . There is need for a radical change in the nature and scope of his activity. His role hereafter should not be that of an engine-driver but of a pointsman only. He should indicate the direction, give forth ideas, and radiate moral and spiritual influence. I have a feeling that we shall need his guidance in future more than we can today imagine."

Very sweet at this time was a visit from the Rt. Rev. Bishop George of Rangoon. He insisted on joining in the evening as well as in the 4 a.m. Ashram prayers, and at Gandhiji's request recited a sweet little prayer, very eloquent and very sincere, "Remove all cowardice and remove all fear", without even a mention of Jesus.

On Christmas day, in a short message to members of the Ashram, Gandhiji said: "We, who have equal regard for all religions, should make it a point to celebrate all such occasions. . . . Let us turn the searchlight inward . . . purge ourselves of all dross (and) realise the oneness of God and the essential sameness of His word. We should . . . bear witness to our faith by being ready to lay down our life for what we hold to be true or right. . . . Let us on this occasion remember and meditate on the fact that Christ mounted the Cross for what he held to be the Truth."

* * *

The passing away of Romain Rolland, who was chiefly responsible for introducing Gandhiji to Europe, was for him a great wrench. "What would you like me to do in grateful memory of your visit? Interpret India's non-violent struggle to the world? Learn Hindustani?" he had asked Gandhiji at parting after Gandhiji's five days' stay with him at Villeneuve in 1931. "Yes," replied Gandhiji, but immediately corrected himself, saying: "No, come and meet India." That was not to be. While sharing Gandhiji's belief in non-violence as the highest ideal for mankind, Romain Rolland felt that Europe was not yet ready for it and unless something was done immediately, it might be too late to save European culture and civilisation from destruction. His concern bordered on an obsession and held him as its close prisoner. A touch of Gandhiji's detachment was what he needed. This alas! his highly rational, analytical mind did not admit of. His sincerity was crystal-pure and his spiritual integrity without a blemish. Gandhiji found in him a fellow-worshipper at the shrine of the God of Truth. There could be no closer bond. "He truly lives . . . in his many and nameless deeds," observed Gandhiji on receiving the report of his death. "He lived Truth and Non-violence as he saw and believed them from time to time. He responded to all suffering. He revolted against wanton human butchery. . . . "[4]

There were many fellow-pilgrims of truth and non-violence who had kindled their lamps at Gandhiji's flame, toiling in different parts of the world in a common quest, some time even unknown to one another. Richard Gregg, an American who lived for sometime at Gandhiji's Ashram at Sabarmati and author of the most scientific exposition of the power of non-violence and the economics of Khaddar, was one such. He wrote to Gandhiji that he was looking forward to returning to him before long. Miss Schlesin, his devoted secretary of South African days, who was as a daughter to him, was another such. Referring to reports of his illness, she wrote to him in her inimitable style: "I was *not* greatly

perturbed when you were ill (I regret your suffering, of course) because I felt confident that you would not depart hence until India was free. . . . I have not the slightest doubt that you *will* live until you are 125, if only you *really* desire it." She was expecting, she added, to meet him at the Peace Conference at San Francisco, and from there to return with him to India. "If you are short of secretaries to accompany you to the Peace Conference, call here on your way and I shall come along."

"I do not think there is any chance of my coming to South Africa or going to America," replied Gandhiji. "But whether I do or not, of course I expect you one day to drop in here and pass the rest of your days in India." In his next letter he wrote to her: "So you see, San Francisco was managed without you and me! But you are dropping in here one of these days. I hope to write the story of 125 years. Hold yourself in patience till I write."

Her next letter ran: "The Aga Khan . . . is reported as saying . . . that the cloud that hangs over India is your old age. Is it possible that he has not heard of your decision to live until you are 125 or does he not understand? In any case your decision has now lifted that cloud, for you are once again in the springtime of life, a more wonderful springtime because enriched by the experience of the years —why, your very handwriting seems to have taken on new vigour. You speak of writing the experience of those 125 years. I hope I shall be privileged to share in the sub-editing of at least a part of that volume."

Herman Kallenbach, the German Jew, was still another fellow-pilgrim. Gandhiji's *alter ego* and inseparable companion in all his struggles and experiments in South Africa, he had vowed that he would never desert him even if the whole world did. They were all hoping to return to him in the evening of his life and range themselves round a common hearth like children of a family after a long and arduous separation. But that was not to be. Kallenbach died a few months later and fate prevented the other two from coming to India during Gandhiji's life-time.

2

Gandhiji's "work-fast" ended on the expiry of the stipulated term but the "speech-fast" continued. Two of Gandhiji's close associates—K. G. Mashruwala and J. C. Kumarappa—were in the meantime released. So were Dr. Syed Mahmud and Dr. Prafulla Ghosh—members of the Congress Working Committee—soon after. Dr. Ghosh was released on grounds of health, but Dr. Mahmud's was a different story.

Dr. Syed Mahmud was a veteran Congress worker since the Khilafat days and the son-in-law of that great nationalist Muslim, Maulana Mazhar-ul-Haque, Barrister-at-law, of Patna. Like Rajaji Dr. Mahmud had also opposed the "Quit India" demand. He had submitted his

resignation from the Congress Working Committee on the 8th August, 1942, before the "Quit India" resolution was passed by the All-India Congress Committee. He had been arrested all the same the next morning together with other members of the Congress Working Committee, as the Government had made preparations for the arrest and imprisonment of certain categories of Congressmen and even non-Congressmen in anticipation of the passing of the "Quit India" resolution irrespective of the responsibility of the individuals concerned. Arrangements, for instance, had been made for detention in the Aga Khan Palace, at Poona, of my sister Dr. Sushila Nayar as Gandhiji's "medical attendant", although she had left the Ashram a year before and was actually teaching in the Lady Hardinge Medical College at Delhi when the "Quit India" resolution was passed.

From his detention Dr. Mahmud had addressed a letter to the Viceroy without the knowledge of his colleagues who were co-detenus with him in the same prison. In his letter he had mentioned the grave injustice of his arrest although he had disagreed with and had even voted against the "Quit India" resolution in the All-India Congress Committee, which he characterised as "a great mistake from all points of view" on Gandhiji's part. After recounting how he had been organising war effort in his home town of Chapra, he ended with a plea for reconciliation with India "in Gandhiji's lifetime".

Dr. Mahmud's letter to the Viceroy satisfied the two conditions laid down by the Viceroy for the release of political prisoners, viz., dissociation from the "Quit India" resolution and an assurance that on their release they would not oppose but co-operate in the war effort. The Government had, therefore, no alternative but to release him.

After his release he came to Gandhiji and admitted that he had been guilty of "gross impropriety" towards his colleagues in Ahmednagar Fort in addressing his letter to the Viceroy without their knowledge and consent, but asked to be believed that his object was not to seek release before the other members of the Working Committee. Gandhiji accepted his *bona fides*, refused to judge him and nursed him with all the affection and care that he was capable of. In a brief statement to the Press he said: "The practical question for Congressmen is whether they are to make use of Dr. Mahmud's services or ostracise him for the 'impropriety' he admits having committed. I have no doubt whatsoever that they should make the best use possible of the services for which his long and unbroken connection with the Congress makes him eminently fit. For me, in spite of his indiscretion, he remains the same dear friend he has been since the Khilafat and before."[5]

Dr. Mahmud suffered no loss of prestige by his candid admission and continued to give his best to the Congress and to hold an honoured place in it, his mistake notwithstanding. Only in a non-violent struggle could such things be possible.

The release of Dr. Mahmud enabled Gandhiji for the first time to have a peep into the Working Committee's mind in detention. Besides his oral testimony, Dr. Mahmud had brought with him a copy of a letter which the Congress President had addressed to the Viceroy after the release of Gandhiji's correspondence with the Viceroy in connection with the "Quit India" movement on the eve of his fast in the Aga Khan Palace in February ,1943. It showed that the Working Committee had not budged even by a hair's breadth from the stand it had taken up in its "Quit India" resolution. Gandhiji had expected nothing less. Its publication marked another glorious milestone in the history of India's non-violent struggle for freedom. The letter ran:

> It is curious that in a fairly lengthy correspondence and in various official statements, nothing is said about the merits of the Resolution passed by the A.I.C.C. which. . .made it clear that a free India would. . .resist invasion to the utmost. . . .It must be known to you that ever since the early beginning of Fascist, Japanese and Nazi aggressions in Africa, Asia and Europe, the Congress has consistently condemned them. . . .It may also be known to you that several members of the present British Government have in the past repeatedly supported or welcomed Fascist and Japanese aggression.
>
> You conclude your letter to Mahatma Gandhi by saying that the charges against the Congress will have to be met sooner or later. We shall welcome that day when we can face the peoples of the world and leave the verdict to them. On that day others also, including the British Government, will have to meet and answer charges. I trust they will also welcome that day.

The official calculation seems to have been that all that was necessary was Lord Balfour's "ten years of firm rule" to tame the people, create a rift between the so-called "right wing" and the "left wing" of the Congress, install a "docile" leadership in the saddle and induce it to seek a compromise with the Government over the head of the Congress Working Committee. To gather intelligence in support of this view and use it as a justification for the continued incarceration of the members of the Congress Working Committee, Sir Francis Mudie, the Home Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council, undertook a lobbying tour of the Provinces in January, 1945. Having found some material to sustain his "will to believe" in north India, this worthy—whose conception of his exalted office as Governor of the West Punjab after partition would appear to be to purvey to his Governor-General, Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah, titbits of eavesdropped personal remarks exchanged between two members of the Indian delegation to an Indo-Pak conference in regard to a colleague[6]—next proceeded to Bombay, and interviewed B. G. Kher, the former Congress Chief Minister of the Province, whom, as Kher put it, he put down in his mental notebook as "a school teacher type, goody-goody man with no political outlook". Some of the questions asked by him and the answers were:

"What is your solution of the deadlock?"

"Discuss it with Gandhiji and release the Working Committee; that would show the way out."

"Would Jawaharlal not prevent any settlement? His release would not help the settlement but it would come in the way if one was arrived at."

"Is that the reason why they are kept in prison?"

Unlike all the Governors, the two Viceroys and several Executive Councillors whom he had met before, Kher afterwards recorded, Mudie did not show the courtesy to move even a step or two forward. "I notice this. I find the door and depart."

In the course of his meeting with another Congress leader in Bombay Sir Francis asked: "What about politics here?"

"We have been pursuing the constructive programme as laid down by Gandhiji."

"Is not the constructive programme like drill? . . . A soldier drills in order to be ultimately qualified to join in war and fight."

"The constructive programme is for national advance."

"How can you expect anything from those whom you intend to fight?"

"Our fight is non-violent."

"Is not there a desire to settle with the Government on the part of the right wing of the Congress?"

"What do you mean by the right wing of the Congress? Do you include Gandhiji in the right wing?"

"Yes, I would include Gandhiji in the right wing. Jawaharlal and Sardar Patel are in the left wing. They are uncompromising."

The attitude of the Home Member was pretty much in evidence in the administration in the Provinces under the Governors' rule. At one place, in the Central Provinces, a programme of collective spinning on Independence Day (26th January, 1945) was prohibited. At another place, a private gathering of Congress workers for organising constructive work was banned. At Sevagram, notices under "Camps and Parades Control Notification" were served on (a) a training camp for constructive workers organised by Gandhiji's grandnephew, Kanu Gandhi, (b) a Basic Teachers' training camp organised by the Hindustani Talimi Sangh, and (c) the Manager of Gandhiji's Ashram. In Bihar, following upon the holding of a conference of Congress workers for the express purpose of reorganising constructive activities, a panicky restrictive order was served on five prominent Congress leaders including two former Ministers. Similar reports were received from other parts of the country, too.

Side by side with this, a gigantic programme of "post-war national reconstruction" was dangled before the people's eyes to sidetrack the issue of independence. Agricultural labour was to be played off against

industrial labour and the landed gentry against industrial interests. Plans were launched in the name of "planned economy" and "rural reconstruction" for dumping on an unprecedented scale, agricultural machinery, advisers, technicians and experts and cheap imported consumer goods on the countryside. In the absence of a truly National Government plans became plots against Indian freedom, to rivet the fetters of slavery on its limbs all the faster by a totalitarian control of the lives of the people and the country's resources. As the lone sentry on the Congress outpost, while his comrades were in prison, Gandhiji felt it was time to sound the tocsin.

"What do you think of the future plans now being made by the Government to dispose of Indian industries under high-sounding phrases, through the nationalist-minded . . . capitalists?" he was asked by a correspondent on the eve of the departure of a deputation of Indian industrialists including Gandhiji's close friends, G. D. Birla and J. R. D. Tata to England and America. It was suggested that they were proceeding under the auspices of the Government, whose object was to inveigle them into a "shameful deal" with the foreign commercial interests.

"They (the Government) have come to know," replied Gandhiji in a statement to the Press, "that the best of us will speak loud and give it the lie by our action. Big merchants, capitalists, industrialists and others speak and write against the Government but in action do its will and even profit through it though the profit may amount to say five per cent. against the Government's ninety-five."[7] All the big interests, he proceeded, had proclaimed with one voice that India wanted nothing less than her own elected National Government to shape her own destiny, free of all foreign control, British or other, but independence would not come for the asking. It would come only when "the interests, big or small, are prepared to forego the crumbs that fall to them from partnership with the British in the loot which British rule takes from India. Verbal protests will count for nothing so long as the partnership continues unchecked." The deputation which the protestants feared would go (under the auspices of the Government) to England and America, he added, dared not proceed "whether for inspection or for entering on a shameful deal" so long as the moving spirits of the Working Committee were being detained without any trial "for the sole crime of sincerely striving for India's independence without shedding a drop of blood save their own."

As Gandhiji sensed the situation, the danger was very real so far as British intentions were concerned. It was necessary to sound the warning. And if that was to be done, the best way was to address it to friends who knew the great esteem in which he held them and who could be depended upon not to misunderstand. That was his way. At the Second Round Table Conference in London in 1931, after he had declared that all vested interests, which on proper scrutiny might be found to have

been illegitimately or unjustly acquired, would be divested, one of the Indian delegates, a titled knight from Bombay, came up to him and said: "Mahatmaji, I congratulate you. You belaboured us but all your blows descended on the backs of the foreign vested interests who are by and large the real culprits."

But some of the industrialist friends in the deputation, who were not familiar with Gandhiji's peculiar technique missed his point and felt hurt. G. D. Birla sent a long wire of protest on their behalf: "Would have dropped idea altogether but for the fact that a promise once made if not wrong in principle, must be carried out."[8] The wire ended with, "Count on your blessings and prayer." The deputation, he explained in a note that followed, was wholly unofficial.

Gandhiji wired in reply: "My statement deals with (a) hypothetical case. . . . You have nothing to regret since you (are) . . . proceeding wholly unofficially. . . . You have my blessings and prayers in terms of famishing naked India."[9]

To J. R. D. Tata, he wrote: "If you have all gone not to commit yourselves to anything, my note protects you. . . . There was no question of my referring to anyone of you."[10]

A friend objected to Gandhiji giving even his conditional blessings to the industrialists. Gandhiji defended his action. "That is the only way in which Ahimsa can act. . . . My blessings will haunt like a ghost anyone who contravenes the condition attaching to it. If anyone after this barters the interests of the poor, my blessings will recoil upon him like a curse." By taking that action, he explained, he had put all concerned, including the British Government, on their honour and made it easier for the industrialist friends to put up a fight against reaction whether within their ranks or without and resist any plan detrimental to Indian interests that might be sought to be foisted upon them.

While the business community, having suffered at the hands of the alien power in common with the rest, was on the whole strongly nationalist in its sympathies, its close association with the Congress was in no small degree due to Gandhiji. By his personal contacts, he was able to influence leading spirits among them as perhaps none else could have done. But for him, as one of them put it, it was quite possible to envisage a situation with the dominant political organisation fundamentally hostile to the business community and the business community unresponsive to personal contacts. The result in that case would have been quite different.

3

How was the non-violent technique to be applied to the rebuilding of the political life of the country in the teeth of arbitrary suppression of civil liberties that was going on in the name of war effort? The

instrument which Gandhiji used for the purpose was that of constructive work, divorced from politics, but consciously linked in the worker's and the people's mind to their political goal.

The Congress organisation had been put out of action in large parts of the country. But in a Satyagraha fight, said Gandhiji, that possibility is always there. A truly non-violent body of workers would not be dismayed or paralysed by it. "Effort can and should be made to revive the Congress organisation. But if you will tell me that constructive work cannot be carried on unless there is a Congress organisation, you do not know how non-violence works. There is nothing to prevent Congressmen from functioning in groups or as individuals *independently of each other and yet achieve co-ordination in the result.* The ideal is for each Congressman to bear on his shoulders the entire weight of the Congress."[11] Failing that, groups of Congress workers could form themselves into *ad hoc* bodies for carrying on constructive work. If they confined themselves to solid, silent and undemonstrative work and eschewed excitement, publicity and speech-making, their course would be made smooth and they would be saved from many a pitfall.

The secret of the success of constructive activity which attains the maximum political results by eschewing all politics is that it is actuated by antagonism towards none. It is the expression of pure non-violence, i.e., the urge to serve one's fellow-men. It aims at purifying the individual and society of the weaknesses and evils which the oppressor exploits to make men sell their soul for a mess of pottage, and themselves, as it were, forge the chains of their slavery.

In such activity there can be no room for rudeness, swagger or swashbuckling heroics. It can never be purposely provocative or calculated to cause embarrassment to anyone. Nor can there be room in it for cowardice, resourcelessness or stupidity. While those engaged in constructive work "will hold themselves in readiness, if the constructive effort is sought to be defeated" they would "never be on the look-out for civil resistance." If constructive work is practised in its fulness by people in their numbers, it can provide a complete substitute for direct action—including civil disobedience. For no tyranny, however arbitrary or absolute it may be, can dare to suppress a programme of self-purification and service, on the score that its ultimate goal is claimed to be the fall of tyranny, any more than it can dare to ban truth because truth would make men free. And as there is no end to the variety of forms that constructive activity can take to suit every climate, time or place, there is practically no limit to the uses to which it may be put for sustaining a righteous struggle under every conceivable sort of repression, and ultimately to overcome it. The reader will find many instances of it in the course of the present story.

What should be the attitude of Congressmen towards the Government? Should Government help, where available, be sought or accepted

for furthering constructive work or should it not? Gandhiji was asked. He replied that Government help could and should be accepted where it could be had on their own terms, viz., without any loss of initiative or freedom of action.

Again, he was asked whether Congressmen pledged to non-violence could help in defending the cases initiated by the Government against those who stood charged with serious offences involving violence. The creed of non-violence, Gandhiji answered, did not preclude securing legal justice even to the worst criminal. If those who were undergoing prosecution or who had been convicted in connection with the 1942 struggle wanted to defend themselves, they should be helped.

In the Central Provinces a number of persons had been sentenced to death in a case of rioting in which some policemen had been killed by a mob in the villages of Ashti and Chimur during the "Quit India" struggle. Terrible reprisals followed and it was alleged that the military had indulged in unmentionable excesses on the womenfolk of the accused after the latter's arrest.

To millions of people in India, the Chimur and Ashti tragedy had become a historic memory. The unfortunate circumstances under which it took place, its tragic aftermath and the long continued mental and physical anguish of the prisoners had invested the whole episode with a pathos and poignancy all its own. Public sentiment was very deeply stirred over the impending hangings. Everybody felt pessimistic but not Gandhiji with his deep conviction that no individual is beyond redemption and no crime outside the pale of clemency. He appealed to the British authorities: "I am opposed to state hangings in every case but most so in cases like this. Whatever was done by the people on and after the 8th August, 1942, was done under excitement. If these hangings are now carried out, it will be cold-blooded, calculated murder and worse because it will be done ceremonially and under the name of so-called law. It will leave behind nothing but great increase in the already existing woeful bitterness. How I wish the threatened hangings were given up!"[12]

At the same time he set himself to mobilise public opinion. Telephone lines were kept buzzing at his host's residence in Bombay till late at night on the eve of the date fixed for the hangings. He sent round an appeal to be issued by the editors of various newspapers. "In places," ran a directive of his, "where unanimity of public opinion can be recorded and there is no danger of dissent arising, the 3rd of April should be observed as an all-India day by suspension of business as a mark of protest and prayer."

The odds seemed to be heavily against any chance of success. But Gandhiji did not believe in dying before one's death. By a stroke of luck a lacuna in the order for execution was discovered by the defence counsel. As a result, the executions were stayed pending the hearing of the petition for revision and retrial. Later Gandhiji entered into correspondence

with the Viceroy about it. By that time the whole political situation had taken a new turn and in the changed circumstances, the Viceroy commuted the death sentences to a sentence for life imprisonment.

* * *

It is amazing, what difference it makes in a grim freedom struggle to have on the scene a person with a clear, steady vision and an imperturbable inner calm, not by virtue of what he says or does but what he is. People went to Gandhiji as to a standard compass to set their courses by. His mere presence gave them a feeling of strength and security. He radiated love, sympathy, consolation and mellowed wisdom to all alike—the tallest and the least. A glimpse of the leaven at work is provided by the record of his voluminous correspondence by which he forged living links with friends, co-workers—even opponents—and outsiders whom he drew to himself and who felt drawn to India by virtue of the universal ideals on which his life and India's struggle for independence under his lead were based. For instance, Dr. Subbaroyan and Dr. Mahmud were both staunch Congressmen but their children had joined the Communist Party. The former's son had been imprisoned. "Regard me as partner in joint joy on the restoration of your son to liberty," he wrote to the happy parents on their son's release. "May he soon join you! Mohan (the son) ought to see me this week. I like him."[13]

After the son had seen him, he again wrote: "I thought I had told you that Mohan had come and gone, again leaving a good impression about himself. I have not even attempted to convert him to my way. I simply let him perceive the affection I have for him."[14]

To Mohan, he later wrote: "Every Congress leader who comes to me tells the same tale (in regard to the Indian Communists). I won't build judgments on what they say but the story produces on me an unconscious effect I would fain avoid. This is thinking aloud, if you please. I agree with L. in so far as he is concerned (in regard to cooperation with the Communists). I disagree so far as I am concerned. For I have no difficulty in working side by side with Communists. One must depend upon one's own experiences."[15]

A letter to Dr. Mahmud, who had put in a plea for cultivating the Communists, ran: "As to the Communists . . . I went out of my way to meet them and to befriend them. But Joshi wrote to me peremptorily that I should not write to him any more. . . . Personally, I would have here any of them as I have Habib (Dr. Mahmud's son). They can convert me. Some of them have come here and stayed. Can I do more? Must I?"[16]

The difference in the political outlook with Rajaji continued as before. But when Rajaji was attacked in the Press by a Congress colleague, Gandhiji wrote to Rajaji: "I do not worry. I literally follow the injunction 'Be careful for nothing'. Everything will be right if we are right. Are you still alone? I did not like M.'s indirect hit. I have written

to him as much. I thank God you possess the hide of the rhinoceros!"[17] How one wishes Rajaji was really so thick-skinned!

Sarojini Naidu had lost her son. To her he wrote[18] adopting the epithet "Spinner of Destiny" which she had applied to him:

My dear Singer,

I have kept yours of 13th ultimo just to give you a few lines of love for your great motherly affection. Your wire was good as from a philosopher, who could put her philosophy to practice at the right moment. Your letter brings out a mother's affection at its best. I do not know whether to love you best as a poetess, philosopher or mother? Tell me.

Spinner

Later, when one of her daughters fell ill, he wrote[19] to the mother:

My dear Singer,

I am not the nicest kind of or any Mahatma. But I know I am a nice father and hence my heart goes out to the nice mother that you are. Here is a note for Lilamani. I hope she will live for you, if not for others. Do keep me informed of L.'s progress.

I take very little interest in the passing show you refer to.

Spinner

And to her ailing daughter[20]:

My dear Lilamani,

You remember sitting on my lap years ago when I was with you in the Golden Threshold? Now you are too big to sit on my lap. But if I was by your side, I would lift your head, put it on my lap and never leave it till you promised that you would literally obey all medical instructions. Your pupils would want you but your recently bereaved mother wants you most. Say 'yes' for her sake and live on.

Love
Bapu

Here is one to a worker in the Harijan cause: "It is more honest to sell your yarn for the required quantity of Khadi (instead of donating the yarn and depending on others for Khadi for personal wear) and take your food from your beggings and devote the rest to Harijan cause. Let the people know your worth. Temple entry is not the only way to remove untouchability. It is one of the many ways, all of which have to be taken."[21]

To the daughter of a friend[22]:

Dear Baby,

You are a baby—as careless as you ever were. You give no address, the date unfinished, spelling defective. And your letter received yesterday, the day

of the wedding. Well, better late than never. So you have my blessigns for X and his wife. Who shall prove worthy of whom?

Love
Bapu

The following "short and sweet" was addressed to Richard Symonds of the Friends Ambulance Unit, who had sent a fellow worker, Glan Davies, and his Indian wife, Sujata, to meet him: "Davies has 'stolen'. He has to prove worthy of the stealth!"[23]

* * *

From time to time, he sent forth winged words, charged with courage which knows no fear, and undying faith in India's destiny and ultimate triumph of the moral law, which reverberated in the hearts of millions and kindled in them something of his own faith.

"The whole of India is a vast prison," ran a short foreword by him to a publication, "Gandhiji's Correspondence with the Government 1942-44." "The Viceroy is the irresponsible superintendent of the prison with numerous jailers and warders under him. . . . If there is a Day of Judgment, i.e. if there is a Judge whom we do not see but who nevertheless is much more truly than we exist for a brief moment, the judgment will go hard against the jailer and in favour of the prisoners. . . . Truth and Non-violence . . . do not disdain real aid from any quarter. If the British and the Allies aid, so much the better. Deliverance will then come sooner. If they do not, deliverance is still certain. Only the agony . . . will be greater, the time longer. But what are agony and time if they are spent in favour of liberty, especially when it is to be brought about through Truth and Non-violence!"

Slowly the situation began to improve. On the 31st March, 1945, in a statement on the eve of the National Week observance[24] he was able to say: "We were never nearer the goal than now, in spite of our many blunders."

4

The war in Europe was drawing to a close. The end of the war in the Far East was expected to follow in due course. But in proportion as the victory drew near peace receded farther. The seed of a third world war was already sown. The dropping of atom bombs on Japan a few months later in August, 1945, gave an indication of the shape of the things to come.

The chaos in men's mind was even worse than the chaos outside. The cry for the trial of the war criminals like "Hang the Kaiser" cry after the first world war, had seized hold of the people's minds.

Writing two months before the end of the hostilities in Europe, on the 7th March, 1945, Gandhiji observed: "The war will end this year or

the next. It will bring victory to the Allies. The pity of it is that it will be only so-called. . . . That victory will be assuredly a prelude to a deadlier war. . . ."

On the death of President Roosevelt, he cabled on the 16th April, a message of "condolence and congratulation" to Mrs. Roosevelt: "The latter because your illustrious husband died in harness and after war had reached a point where Allied victory had become certain. He was spared the humiliating spectacle of being party to a peace which threatens to be prelude to war bloodier still if possible."

Mrs. Roosevelt replied that it was her "fervent hope" that "your fears with regard to the type of peace will prove unfounded."[25] But signs were against any such hope.

"Why do you feel so sceptical about the possibility of a lasting peace emerging from the defeat of the Axis Powers?" Mr. Ralph Coniston of the *Collier's Weekly* asked Gandhiji in an off-the-record interview.

"The reason is patent," Gandhiji replied. "Violence is bound sooner or later to exhaust itself but peace cannot issue out of such exhaustion. I am uttering God's truth when I say that unless there is a return to sanity, violent people will be swept off the face of the earth. . . . Those who have their hands dyed deep in blood cannot build a non-violent order for the world."

Gandhiji's interviewer suggested that while the representatives of the big powers who would be meeting at San Francisco were what they were, the people at large, after the experience of the horrors of war, would force the hands of their respective Governments.

Gandhiji disagreed. "I know the European mind well enough to know that when it has to choose between abstract justice and self-interest, it will plump for the latter. The man in the street even in America does not think much for himself. He will put faith in what Roosevelt says. Roosevelt gives him markets, credit and all that. Similarly Churchill can say to the English working class that he has kept the Empire intact and preserved for them the foreign markets. The people will, as they do, follow him."

"So, you don't think that the average man in Europe or America cares much for the high ideals for which the war is professed to be fought?"

"I am afraid, I do not. If you hold the contrary view, I shall honour you for your belief but I cannot share it."

"Then, you don't think the Big Five or the Big Three can guarantee peace?"

"I am positive. If they are so arrogant as to think that they can have lasting peace while the exploitation of the coloured and the so-called backward races goes on, they are living in a fool's paradise."

"You think they will fall out among themselves before long?"

"There you are stealing my language. The quarrel with Russia has already started. It is only a question when the other two—England and America—will start quarrelling with each other. May be, pure self-interest will dictate a wiser course and those who will be meeting at San Francisco will say: 'Let us not fall out over a fallen carcass.' The man in the street will gain nothing by it. Freedom of India along non-violent lines, on the other hand, will mean the biggest thing for the exploited races of the earth. I am, therefore, trying to concentrate on it. If India acts on the square when her turn comes, it will not dictate terms at the Peace Conference but peace and freedom will descend upon it, not as a terrifying torrent, but as 'gentle rain from heaven'. Liberty won non-violently will belong to the least. That is why I swear by non-violence. Only when the least can say, 'I have got my liberty' have I got mine."

The conversation then turned on the issue of the treatment of the aggressor nations after the war.

"As a non-violent man, I do not believe in the punishment of individuals," remarked Gandhiji, "much less can I stomach the punishment of a whole nation."

"What about war criminals?"

"What is a war criminal?" he asked sharply. Was not war itself a crime against God and humanity and, therefore, were not all those who sanctioned, engineered, and conducted wars, war criminals? "War criminals are not confined to the Axis Powers alone. Roosevelt and Churchill are no less war criminals than Hitler and Mussolini."

He reiterated, what more than one Britisher had confessed to him, that Hitler was "Great Britain's sin". "Hitler is only an answer to British Imperialism, and this I say in spite of the fact that I hate Hitlerism and its anti-Semitism. England, America and Russia have all of them, got their hands dyed more or less red—not merely Germany and Japan. The Japanese have only proved themselves to be apt pupils of the West. They have learnt at the feet of the West and beaten it at its own game."

"What would you see accomplished at San Francisco?"

"Parity among all nations—the strongest and the weakest—the strong should be the servants of the weak not their masters or exploiters."

"Is not this too idealistic?"

"May be. But you asked me what I would *like* to be accomplished. It is my belief that human nature is ever working upward. I can therefore never take a pessimistic view of the future of human nature. If the Big Five say, 'We shall hold on to what we have', the result will be a terrible catastrophe and then heaven help the world and the Big Five. There will be another and bloodier war and another San Francisco."

"Would the results of the second San Francisco be any better than that of the first?"

"I hope so. They will be saner then. They will have gained their balance somewhat after their third experience."

Would he not go to the West to teach them the art of peace? In answer Gandhiji described how before the Second World War some British pacifists, including Dick Shepard and Maude Royden had written to him asking him to point the way. "My reply in substance was: 'Even if one of you can become true in the right sense of the word, that one man will be able to inculcate non-violence among the European folk. I cannot today save Europe, however much I may like to. I know Europe and America. If I go there I shall be like a stranger. Probably I shall be lionised but that is all. I shall not be able to present to them the science of peace in a language they can understand. But they will understand if I can make good my non-violence in India. I shall then speak through India.' I, therefore, declined to accept the invitations from America and Europe. My answer would be the same today."

"If you were at San Francisco, what would you be advocating there?"

"If I knew I would tell you but I am made differently. When I face a situation, the solution comes to me. I am not a man who sits down and thinks out problems syllogistically. I am a man of action. I react to a situation intuitively. Logic comes afterwards, it does not precede the event. The moment I am at the Peace Conference, I know the right word will come. But not beforehand. This much, however, I can say that whatever I say there will be in terms of peace, not war."

Finally they came to the question of a world Government. What kind of world organisation would promote an enduring peace or preserve it?

"Only an organisation based predominantly on truth and non-violence."

"With the present imperfect condition of the world and human nature, what means would in your opinion promote peace?"

"Nearest approach to the condition laid down in my answer to the previous question."

"Would you have a world Government?"

"Yes. I claim to be a practical idealist. I believe in compromise so long as it does not involve the sacrifice of principles. I may not get a world Government that I want just now but if it is a Government that would just touch my ideal, I would accept it as a compromise. Therefore, although I am not enamoured of a world federation, I shall be prepared to accept it, if it is built on an essentially non-violent basis."

The limit of his compromise he had explained in a letter to a Polish friend as follows: "There may be a world police to keep order in the absence of universal belief in non-violence."[26]

If the nations of the world were to consider world Government as a means for preserving peace and promoting the welfare of all peoples, would he advocate the abandonment of India's aspiration for independence in order to join in the general plan? he was finally asked.

"If you will carefully go through the much abused Congress resolution of August, 1942," Gandhiji replied, "you will discover that

independence is necessary for India becoming an efficient partner in any scheme for the preservation of lasting peace in the world."

As early as 1942, he observed in a statement on the eve of the San Francisco Conference, the Congress had declared that the future peace, security and ordered progress of the world demanded a world federation of free nations which would ensure the freedom of its constituent nations, the prevention of aggression and exploitation by one nation over another, the protection of national minorities, the advancement of all backward areas and people, and the pooling of the world's resources for the common good of all.[27] That resolution had further gone on to say that on the establishment of such a world federation, disarmament would be practised by all countries, and that an independent India would gladly join such a world federation.

As a life-long believer in peace as against war he was convinced, he observed in the course of the same statement, that there could be no peace for the Allies or the world unless they shed their belief in the efficacy of war and its accompanying terrible deception and fraud. "I very much fear that behind the structure of world security sought to be raised lurk mistrust and fear which breed war."

Similarly, there could be no world peace or world security till the Allied nations were determined to hammer out real peace based on freedom and equality of all races and nations. "The exploitation and domination of one nation over another can have no place in a world striving to put an end to all war. In such a world only the militarily weaker nations will be free from the fear of intimidation or exploitation."

The first step towards the realisation of that state was that India should be declared independent forthwith. So long as India and other countries like her were lying prostrate at the feet of the Allies, there could be no peace in the world. "Freedom of India would demonstrate to all the exploited races of the earth that their freedom is very near. . . . Thus the demand for Indian independence is in no way selfish. Its nationalism spells internationalism."

The peace, he went on to add, must be just. "In order to be that it must neither be punitive nor vindictive. Germany and Japan should not be humiliated. . . . The effort then will be to turn them into friends. The strong are never vindictive. . . . Therefore, the fruits of peace must be equally shared. . . . The Allies can prove their democracy by no other means. . . . It follows from the foregoing that there will be no armed peace imposed upon the forcibly disarmed."

For votaries of peace, Gandhiji felt, the hour of action had once more presented itself. The war had found even some of the stoutest wanting. Fear gripped people in the throat then. That cramped action. But now that the nightmare of fear was over, they had to vindicate their faith by pitting themselves boldly and uncompromisingly against the victors' lust for revenge and spoliation and for the humiliation of the

vanquished. The conditions enumerated by him for world peace provided the real test for modern civilisation.

If the foregoing essentials of peace were accepted, concluded Gandhiji, as a natural step, the "camouflage" of Indian representation at the San Francisco Conference through Indians nominated by the British Imperialism should be stopped. "Such representation will be worse than no representation. Either India at San Francisco is represented by an elected representative or represented not at all."

But the time for it was not yet. India had to pass through rivers of fire to get its rightful place in the council of free nations.

5

At last the shape of things began to change.

The tide of war had definitely turned in Europe but it was thought that even after the defeat of the Axis Powers in Europe it would take at least another two years for Japan to be put out of the field, and in that final phase of the struggle India would become the main base of the Allied operations in the East. Lord Wavell, as the man on the spot, felt that without the cooperation of the various Indian political parties it would not be possible for him to get from India, ravaged by famine and seething with discontent, the active cooperation necessary for that role. He, therefore, became interested in finding a way out.

Some time after the Gandhi-Jinnah talks, in a meeting with Bhulabhai Desai, the Leader of the Congress Party in the Central Assembly, the Viceroy told him that he wanted to make use of his (Bhulabhai's) good offices for ending the political deadlock. Things had gone too far. They could not be allowed to remain as they were. Sooner or later they had to come together. If a National Government was formed by the Congress and the Muslim League parliamentary parties, he would welcome it.

The Viceroy further assured Bhulabhai that though the Coalition National Government would necessarily have to work within the framework of the 1935 India Act, he himself would be anxious to go the fullest length to meet their viewpoint. Bhulabhai on his part felt there was no guarantee that the war would end soon or that a more favourable situation would present itself at the end of it. The opportunity and the offer were too good to be missed. Incidentally, this would also improve the chances of the release of the Congress Working Committee members, whose continued detention stood in the way of any political settlement.

Encouraged by his talks Bhulabhai met Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, the Deputy Leader of the Muslim League party in the Central Assembly. The Nawabzada said that a Congress-League coalition at the Centre was not only desirable but possible. During the course of these conversations, Bhulabhai stated afterwards, he had asked the

Nawabzada to mention the matter to Jinnah "and later on I gathered from him that he had done so."[28] Bhulabhai became hopeful.

In the first week of January, 1945, he met Gandhiji at Sevagram and discussed with him the whole question. Gandhiji told him that he (Bhulabhai) knew best the parliamentary ways and the mind of the Congressmen who thought that way. His own mind ran in a contrary direction. He did not believe that independence could come through parliamentary activity. But he recognised that the parliamentary mentality had come to stay. There was room for both the points of view in the Congress. Bhulabhai was free to act according to his best judgment. In a note, summarising his conversation with Bhulabhai, he wrote: "Let no-one use this as a cover for himself but let everybody think and decide independently. This can, however, be used to show that I was not opposed to this move."[29]

"If a Congress-League coalition of *my conception* is formed," Gandhiji's note continued, "I would welcome it. If the Congress and the League join hands in parliamentary work, I would like it. But for that you should obtain the authority of the Working Committee. Without it, I see danger in concluding any pact. The League ought to join in securing the release of the Congress Working Committee." The note concluded: "I would not like you to allow yourself to be dragged in anyhow."

The following were the various steps proposed to be taken in this behalf as they emerged from their discussion and the elucidations provided by Gandhiji from time to time:

1. The Congress and the League would agree that they would join in forming an Interim Government in the Centre (a) consisting of equal numbers of persons nominated by the Congress and the League in the Central Legislature, (b) representatives of minorities, and (c) the Commander-in-Chief.

2. While the Government would be formed and would function within the framework of the existing Government of India Act, it would be clearly understood between the Congress and the League that any measure not passed by the House, should not be enforced or sought to be enforced by any of the powers of the Governor-General under the constitution. This would serve to eliminate in action the veto of the Governor-General and make the nominees responsible to the elected Legislature.

3. The European member, if one had to be included, should be the choice of the Congress and the League.

4. It should be agreed between the Congress and the League in advance that if such Interim Government was formed, their first step would be to release the members of the Working Committee. A firm and clear commitment of the League in regard to this would be a preliminary proof of its *bona fides*.

5. Bhulabhai must make sure before committing himself to anything that the agreement he had in view had the previous approval of Jinnah and the whole thing should be clarified and reduced to writing so as not to lead to any ambiguity or misunderstanding afterwards.

6. If such a Government was formed at the Centre, the next step would be to get the withdrawal of Governor's rule in the Provinces and to form, as soon as possible, Provincial Governments on the lines of a coalition.

7. At the proper moment Gandhiji would tell the Working Committee that Bhulabhai had acted with his approval.

* * *

"If it is possible to meet the Working Committee, will you try to persuade the Working Committee to accept this plan?" Gandhiji was asked.

"Yes."

"What are your arguments in favour of this plan?"

"After my talks with Jinnah, Jinnah told many people that Gandhi had not even mentioned Interim Government. Bhulabhai's effort is a reply to this. But if the intentions of the League are not genuine, nothing will come out of it."

"What happens if the Viceroy uses his veto over the head of the Congress and the League?"

"In that case there will be an agreement between Bhulabhai and Liaquat Ali that the Government will resign."

Consequently, an agreement known as Bhulabhai-Liaquat Ali Pact was reached, and initialled copies of the same were exchanged between Bhulabhai and Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan on the 11th January, 1945, in regard to the formation of an Interim Government at the Centre. According to his understanding with the Nawabzada, Bhulabhai communicated to the Viceroy the basis of the understanding arrived at between them and asked for immediate action being taken on it.

From the very beginning Gandhiji had laid the greatest stress on the need for firmness and detachment on the part of Bhulabhai in handling his mission, if a satisfactory settlement was to be pulled through. On the 14th January, in a note to Bhulabhai, he wrote: "I am startled by what has appeared in the Press. Jinnah Saheb says whatever he pleases. Liaquat Ali does the same. It is also being said that I desire the formation of a Coalition Ministry over the head of the Working Committee. What is all this? I have boundless confidence in you. You will please see to it that nothing is done without the permission of the Working Committee. . . . I can understand all the things being done simultaneously. But you should make it clear that we cannot take a single step without the Working Committee."

Soon after this, the Nawabzada in the course of a speech at Tinnevally and later on the floor of the Assembly denied that there was any

"pact" between him and Bhulabhai, and Jinnah categorically denied that he was consulted or was in any way party to it.

"How can there be a settlement with him," wrote Gandhiji to Bhulabhai on the 31st January, referring to the Nawabzada's speech. "This is only to draw your attention to it so that you may be warned. . . . Things as they appear to me from a distance are frightening."

Bhulabhai wrote back: "I shall again have a talk with him (Nawabzada) and then see you. I am putting a heavy strain on you but we have got into that habit and our good and the country's good demands it."[30]

In the meantime a common friend saw Gandhiji and obtained from him further elucidations on some of the points at issue. "Arrests have again started," Gandhiji remarked in the course of his talks with this friend, "and that is a bad sign. Bhulabhai must take a firm line and tell the Viceroy that this will not do."

In a note which Gandhiji sent to Bhulabhai on 20th February, he wrote: "What is happening in the country perturbs me. But you should go ahead unperturbed and do only what is right and proper. It does not matter if the negotiations break down."

The rejection of the appeal for mercy on behalf of the Ashti-Chimur prisoners at this stage hardened Gandhiji's attitude. Extremely sensitive to the slightest variation in the moral atmosphere around him, he became more and more insistent on the "present tense". This was very much in evidence when Bhulabhai met him at Mahabaleshwar in June, 1945. It being Gandhiji's day of silence, he scribbled: "Considering what is happening around us, I see danger in this association with the League. This much is clear that without the Congress Working Committee's release and consent nothing can be done in the name of the Congress. It should be no less clear that if Ashti-Chimur prisoners were hanged, it would spoil the whole thing. Unless the League's attitude showed a change and that, too, without any bargaining, I would have no deal with the League even if the Congress Working Committee consents. . . . The distinction (sought to be made by Jinnah) between the League and non-League Muslims is dangerous. . . . I would not touch such a thing with a long pole. . . . I would like you to prepare a draft clarifying all the (remaining) points. . . . The Congress cannot imitate the League. . . . The League may not recognise any Muslims outside the League. The Congress has to think in terms of the whole nation. You will not be able to bring your vessel to port by leaving out the non-League Muslims. . . . You should proceed keeping fully in mind my limits. My attitude is becoming stiffer and stiffer every day. . . . Behind it is my growing faith in non-violent non-cooperation and corresponding indifference to parliamentary activity. . . . It is difficult for me to say where my present mood will ultimately take me, because my faith in the Unseen Power is growing daily. I, therefore, think very little of tomorrow."

But in spite of Gandhiji's repeated warnings that he should get everything reduced to writing before committing himself to anything, and further to see to it that it had Jinnah's approval, Bhulabhai, it seems, allowed his over-eagerness for results to get the better of his legal acumen and foresight and failed to take the elementary precautions that had been suggested to him. He chose to follow the line of least resistance. For this he had to pay a heavy penalty.

The copy of the agreement with the Nawabzada which Bhulabhai had sent to Gandhiji bore the initials both of the Nawabzada and Bhulabhai but later the Nawabzada stated: "This is not so. Mr. Desai initialled one copy and handed it to me and took my initials on the other. The copy that I had with me bears only Mr. Desai's initials and is not initialled by both of us as stated by him. It seemed rather unnecessary at the time to be so formal about it, but in the light of what has happened subsequently, I am glad that it was so. . . . Mr. Desai knows full well that there is no 'pact' but mere proposals, which were only a basis for discussion. . . . "[31]

Bhulabhai also satisfied himself with his own impression in regard to the vital condition of Jinnah's previous assent to the proposals. "I made it plain to him (Bhulabhai)," the Nawabzada afterwards stated, "that whatever I said was my personal view and that I had no occasion to consult Mr. Jinnah about the matter."[32]

The agreement thus remained still-born and the Congress High Command, when they met after their release, disapproved of it and took a very grave view of the way Bhulabhai had gone about his business. His name was not included in the Congress list for the National Government at the Simla Conference in July, 1945, and in the next general elections, he was not nominated as a candidate for the Central Assembly. He died heartbroken soon after. But in the meantime the agreement that he had concluded had laid the foundation of Lord Wavell's proposal of June, 1945, for the formation of an Interim National Government at the Centre.

Gandhiji never ceased to defend Bhulabhai's attempt, as it was an attempt to resolve the deadlock and settle the communal question by arriving at an agreement among themselves without third party intervention, and if successful, would have enabled them to realise the principle of responsibility at the Centre by the joint action of the Congress and the League. As such, he would have preferred it infinitely to any solution imposed by an outside power. To eliminate the vicious "third party" influence became more and more the corner-stone of his policy as the only way to avert the tragedy of India's dismemberment into two potentially hostile neighbouring States, which otherwise he saw was inevitable.

* * *

Other portents began gradually to appear on the horizon.

In the Muslim-majority North-West Frontier Province, the Congress Ministry under Dr. Khan Saheb had resigned on the 7th November, 1939, together with the Congress Ministries in other Provinces, in response to the Congress Working Committee's decision. No alternative Ministry could be formed and the Governor's rule under Section 93 of the Government of India Act was introduced into the Province. The deadlock continued till May, 1943, when the Governor invited Sardar Aurangzeb Khan to form a Muslim League Ministry although he commanded the support of only 20 members in a House of 50, out of which 33 were functioning members, with seven vacancies unfilled and ten Congress members in jail in connection with "Quit India" movement. The Ministry was kept in office by the continued incarceration of the Congress members. It made itself so unpopular by its ineptitude, cupidity and corruption that even some of its adherents were disgusted and withdrew their support. That, coupled with the release of 5 Congress members, raised the strength of the Congress in the House to 23 against the League Ministry's 21.

In January, 1945, a deputation from the Frontier Province, headed by Mehar Chand Khanna, who later became by turns first, Finance Minister in the Frontier Province, then a homeless refugee, and finally the Rehabilitation Minister in the Indian Union after independence, came to Sevagram and told Gandhiji that a majority of the members were ready to support a no-confidence motion against the Aurangzeb Khan Ministry. The Governor had promised that he would allow the no-confidence motion to be brought in, if Dr. Khan Saheb was prepared to form an alternative Ministry.

Bhulabhai Desai was not in favour of this move since it might jeopardise the negotiations he was conducting with Liaquat Ali Khan. But Gandhiji held a contrary view. He told the deputation that whatever might be the case with other Provinces, he was firmly of opinion that in the Frontier Province Congressmen should form an alternative Ministry if the no-confidence motion was successful. They could make their full contribution to the struggle for freedom without creating a deadlock. He would have asked them—and all Congressmen—to withdraw from the Assembly and resort to total non-cooperation if they had made greater progress in non-violence than he judged they had. As things stood, such a course was fraught with grave risk. There was no atmosphere for it. They could, therefore, go ahead with the no-confidence motion and form a Congress Ministry.

Armed with this advice ("million-rupee secret", as Mehar Chand Khanna later described it with a swagger to waiting pressmen) Khanna returned to Peshawar and on the 12th March, 1945, the Muslim League Ministry was thrown out and a Congress Ministry under Dr. Khan Saheb installed in its place. Its first act was to release Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Dr. Khan Saheb's younger brother, popularly known

as Badshah Khan, sometimes also as "Frontier Gandhi", and the Khudai Khidmatgars—servants of God—who had thrown away their weapons to follow his (Badshah Khan's) non-violent lead.

Assam followed suit in a few days, when the purely League Ministry was forced to reform itself as a Congress-supported Coalition.

6

Public opinion in Great Britain as well as the neutral world opinion was veering round to the side of Indian independence. Great Britain had cut a sorry figure at the Commonwealth Relations Conference, when its own nominee, the leader of the Indian delegation, demanded Dominion Status for India by a fixed date and told the British statesmen that they could not prevent India from achieving her goal. Lord Wavell had never ceased to press upon Whitehall the need for a resolution of the Indian deadlock to enable India's active cooperation to be enlisted in the prosecution of the war in the Far East. In March, 1945, he was invited by His Majesty's Government to London for consultation. While he was still there, the war in Europe ended in the first week of May, and consequent upon Labour Party's refusal to carry on the Coalition until the war with Japan shall have ended, the Coalition Government resigned on the 23rd May. A caretaker Government under Churchill took over charge and the 5th July was fixed as the date for general elections in Great Britain.

As the election day drew near, even Tory diehards began to feel that the realities could no longer be ignored. And so, on the 14th June, after consultation with the Government in Great Britain and its concurrence, Lord Wavell made an announcement of the constitutional changes to be attempted to be made "within the framework of the 1935 Government of India Act". Under this announcement the Viceroy was to make an attempt to form a National Government which would replace the existing Viceroy's Executive Council, amongst others "with equal proportions of caste Hindus and Muslims" selected in consultation with the political leaders. This was accompanied by the release of the members of the Congress Working Committee from detention.

In accordance with the Viceregal announcement, a conference was held at Simla (Simla Conference I) under the chairmanship of the Viceroy between the representatives of the various parties chosen by the Viceroy. The conference began on the 25th June and ended on the 14th July, 1945.

Invitations to attend the conference were issued to twenty-one persons—11 Premiers of Provinces, Leader of the Congress party and the Deputy Leader of the Muslim League party in the Central Assembly, the Leaders of the Congress party and the Muslim League party respectively in the Council of State, the Leaders of the Nationalist party

and the European group in the Central Assembly, one representative each of the Scheduled Castes and the Sikhs, and finally Gandhiji and Jinnah "as the recognised leaders of the two main political parties". No invitation was sent to the Congress President.

Gandhiji was at Panchgani, a hill-station near Poona, where, still weak after his recent illness, he had gone to convalesce under medical advice on the onset of warm weather, when the text of the Viceregal broadcast was put into his hands by a Press correspondent. He immediately wired to the Viceroy that he (Gandhiji) represented no institution; he had ceased to be even a primary member of the Congress since 1934. "As an individual I can only tender advice."[33] And again: "My presence in it (the conference) will change the official colour, unless I become an official representative of the Congress."[34] The Congress President was the proper authority, he reminded the Viceroy, to be approached so far as the Congress viewpoint was concerned. The Viceroy recognised the force of his argument and rectified the mistake by sending an invitation to the Congress President to attend the conference.

Gandhiji, however, agreed to go to Simla and to meet the Viceroy and stay there as long as the Viceroy wanted. "You have known the late Deenabandhu as C. F. Andrews was affectionately called by us," he wrote to the Viceroy. "He severed his official connection with the Cambridge mission and the Church in order to serve religion, India and humanity better. The position he occupied as a valuable link between India and England, whether official or non-official and between all classes and parties, grew as days went. If I can, I would love to occupy such a position. It may never come to me. Men can but try."[35]

Even more ominous was the avoidance of the word "independence" in the Viceregal broadcast, and the introduction of "caste-Hindu Muslim parity" in the proposed National Government as a basic condition. Drawing the Viceroy's attention to this point, Gandhiji wired: "Personally I can never subscribe to it (caste-Hindu Muslim parity) nor the Congress, if I know its mind. In spite of having overwhelming Hindu membership the Congress has striven to be purely political. I am quite capable of advising the Congress to nominate all non-Hindus and most decidedly non-caste Hindus."[36] And again: "Congress has never identified (itself) with caste or non-caste Hindus and never can, even to gain independence, which will be one-sided, untrue and suicidal."[37]

The Viceroy in reply assured Gandhiji that acceptance of the invitation did not "commit the parties" to anything. The members would be free to discuss the pros and cons of the proposals at the conference and to accept or reject them as they chose. That cleared the ground for the Congress participation in the conference.

The Working Committee of the Congress met at Bombay after a period of three years and drew up an "instrument of instructions" for its nine representatives who had been invited to the conference. Among

other things it took note of the fact that the All-India Congress Committee and other Congress Committees were still banned and that was "an obstacle in our (their) way and must be regarded as coercion." Further, "large numbers of Congress prisoners must interfere with the progress of the conference." Most of the Congress leaders had come out of prison with shattered health. A friend described the Working Committee meeting as a "sick parade" ! However, they decided that "Congress as an organisation" should participate in the forthcoming conference. The Working Committee particularly charged its representatives at the conference to bear in mind that, "Allied victory in South-East Asia must mean freedom of the countries concerned from all Imperialist control, British or other. . . . Prohibition of the use of Indian resources for the deprivation of freedom of any other countries must be an accepted fact."

There were delirious crowds at various stations all along the 1,100 miles route between Bombay and Simla to welcome the members of the Congress Working Committee on their release after 34 months of incarceration. Patience and non-violence had triumphed. The people were on the rebound. One had only to add to this the fact that here the authorities had offered the rebels of yesterday military cars, special trains and aircraft to facilitate their presence at the conference and contrast it with what was happening in conquered Germany to realise the difference between a violent and a non-violent struggle.

Gandhiji refused to go into the air-conditioned coach that had been reserved for other Congress leaders proceeding to Simla and insisted on travelling third-class. Mr. Preston Grover of the United Press of America was with him on the same train. Solicitous about his health, he handed him a short note at one of the halts on the way: "Would not it be wise for you to go into the cooler Congress car for the afternoon, so you could stretch yourself a while? You have not had any sleep for 24 hours. It is not going to help much if you arrive at Simla tired out from the interruptions in your sleep at wayside stations. As we would say in America, 'Give yourself a break'."

He received the following in reply from the Mahatma: "Many thanks for your considerate note. But let me melt myself in this natural heat. As sure as fate, this heat will be followed by refreshing coolness which I shall enjoy. Let me feel just a touch of real India."

After a hurried bath and meal on arrival at Simla, Gandhiji went to the Viceregal Lodge for his first meeting with the Viceroy. "I, too, am a soldier like you though I bear no arms." Gandhiji began his interview with the Viceroy. As he rose to leave at the end of the meeting, he sent his compliments to Lady Wavell. The Viceroy introduced him to Lady Wavell with whom he had a talk for half an hour. The Viceroy's son was present during the conversation and took a keen interest in it.

From his raised seat in Rajkumari Amrit Kaur's residence, where he lived for the next three weeks, could be seen, through a light haze,

an enchanting panorama of fir-clad hills and deep valleys. Glorious bursts of sun-shine in between the rain and the mist revealed in the far distance, beyond the sunlit hill-slopes, the dazzling vista of the perpetual Himalayan snows shining like a crystal diadem against a sapphire blue sky. "The world has nothing to equal it," murmured Gandhiji in a rapture. No wonder, the extra systoles (missing heart beats—sign of acute overstrain and exhaustion) disappeared in spite of the strenuous labours before he left Simla at the end of the conference.

The Viceroy was very keen on Gandhiji attending the conference as a delegate but Gandhiji maintained that in a representative conference like that no individual, however eminent, could have a place who was not a delegate. Constitutional correctitude required that he should be left out, but if his advice was wanted he would stay in Simla during the conference and even attend it as a visitor. The Viceroy said he would like him to stay in Simla during the conference. Gandhiji agreed.

It transpired afterwards that Jinnah had aired it as a grievance that Gandhiji had "withdrawn" from the conference. "If Mr. Jinnah wants me there," said Gandhiji in an interview with Preston Grover, "he can take me there. Such a gesture on Jinnah's part would mean that he wants a settlement even in the teeth of differences and obstacles that face the conference."

On all accounts Lord Wavell began well, guiding the deliberations of the conference with great tact, delicacy and a quiet wisdom: "I said in my broadcast that on all sides there was something to forgive and forget. . . . You must accept my leadership for the present. . . . I will endeavour to guide the discussion of this conference in what I believe to be the best interests of the country."

Commented Gandhiji referring to this part of the Viceroy's speech: "It is a good and dignified expression that Lord Wavell has used. He thus acts in the conference as its leader and not as the agent of Whitehall."

The Viceroy deftly bypassed thorny points when they threatened to hold up progress. He was trying to explain that he had nowhere suggested that the Congress was a Hindu body when Jinnah launched forth on one of his usual diatribes against the Congress, characterising it as a "Hindu" body. A passage at arms followed:

Viceroy: "There is nothing in my proposals which characterises Congress as a communal body."

Jinnah: "We have met here as communities and Congress does not represent anybody but the Hindus."

Viceroy: "Congress represents its members."

Dr. Khan Saheb: "What does he mean? I am a Congressman. Am I a Hindu or a Muslim?"

Viceroy: "Leave it at that. The Congress represents its members."

* * *

Gandhiji argued with the Congress leaders that he took the Viceregal announcement in regard to parity to mean that neither community could ask for more representation than the other but "was free to accept less if it chose". Congress should accept the position that the non-scheduled Hindus would in no case exceed Muslims and break the parity by nominating the best Indians drawn from all minority groups, including one representative each of Anglo-Indians, Englishmen, Parsis, Sikhs, Jews (if available), Indian Christians, Scheduled Castes and women, and irrespective of whether they were Congress members or not. There need not thus be more than one or two Hindus apart from the Scheduled Castes, and even they not as such but because they were the best Indians available, as for instance Pandit Nehru. This would leave the Muslim League with a panel of three or more including a nationalist Muslim in a Council of fourteen. By refusing to exercise the right of parity on behalf of the Hindus, they would cut across sectional complications and lay a solid and safe foundation for the independent India to be, on a purely nationalist basis. If they accepted the parity formula, it would inevitably give rise to a gladiatorial duel between the Hindus and Muslims in the Viceroy's Executive Council and bring into play the Viceroy's veto. But they could render nugatory the parity part of the Viceregal proposal if they voluntarily chose sub-parity for the Hindus by selecting the bulk of their nominees from among the minorities.

With five Muslim members pitted against five "caste Hindus", the Muslim League, with the help of the Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief, could any time create a tie in the Cabinet. If, on the other hand, the Cabinet was largely composed of patriotic nationalist-minded minority group representatives with only one, two or even three "caste Hindus", there would be no communal alignment in the Cabinet and the League would be beating the empty air if it tried to raise the bogey of "the Hindu majority rule".

Unfortunately, the Congress Working Committee could not be persuaded to adopt Gandhiji's proposal, though several members of the Working Committee and outstanding Congress leaders, individually, were convinced of the wisdom of his stand. "It appeals to me; Gandhiji is right," remarked the ex-Chief Minister of a Province to one of his colleagues. "And you expect to be able to face the electorate after accepting sub-parity for the Hindus?" replied the latter. The Chief Minister shut up. My diary under the date 29th June, 1945, contains the following:

"Bapu explained his views on parity to Ravishankar Shukla, B. G. Kher, and Shrikrishna Sinha (ex-Chief Ministers of C. P., Bombay and Bihar respectively) on the evening of the 25th, and later to Rajaji. He sent me to explain the same to Maulana Saheb and Rajaji again on the morning of the 26th. On the 26th afternoon the Maulana

Saheb saw Bapu. Bapu made it very clear in the course of his talk that so far as he was concerned he could have nothing to do with this parity business or a Congress that was committed to it. The Maulana Saheb left giving an impression that in principle he wholeheartedly approved of Bapu's stand. But on the afternoon of the 28th, when the delegates returned from the conference, it was learnt that the conference had accepted all the five fundamental principles of the Wavell offer as put forth by the Viceroy, including parity. . . . It has been contended that the Wavell proposal leaves no freedom to renounce parity even if one of the parties so wishes. Bapu has, however, made it clear to all concerned that an imposed parity would make the offer stink in his nostrils and render the Viceregal proposal wholly unacceptable.

"It has again been argued that whilst the Congress may insist on the principle of choosing best men, irrespective of caste, creed or party affiliations, and even give preference to minority group representatives (subject to the condition that they stand for independence and work for it) it cannot insist on sub-parity for the Hindus. That can be properly done by a purely Hindu organisation. Bapu's view-point, however, is that Congress, being pledged to act as a national organisation, cannot accept that position. Nor can the conference object to the Congress taking that stand in regard to the Hindus, since Congress claims to speak on behalf of the Hindus, too, as a part of the Indian nation, and the composition of the conference is of a political rather than communal character. The League is there as one of the dominant political parties in the Assembly. If it was intended that the various groups should function on a communal basis, the Hindu Mahasabha should have been invited and the Congress left out.

"Jinnah strongly objects to giving a liberal representation to the minorities in the Council because he says they would vote with the Congress. . . ."

And so, in spite of Gandhiji's "earnest protest" parity was retained. Wrote Gandhiji sorrowfully to Lord Wavell: "This does not mean any change on my part. I am more than ever convinced that the non-scheduled Hindu (caste Hindus) members should have been less than the Muslims."[38]

There were cross consultations between Jinnah and Govind Ballabh Pant, the ex-Premier of U. P. The Congress wanted the League to accommodate two non-League Muslims within its quota just as the Congress was accommodating the same number of non-Congressmen within its quota. In the conference Jinnah asked Pant whether he meant one non-League Muslim when he said two. On Pant replying that he meant what he said, there was a deadlock. The Viceroy thereupon suggested that Jinnah and the Congress President should meet in the presence of Richardson, the leader of the European group, and himself. Jinnah manœuvred himself out of it by saying that he and Govind Ballabh Pant

would be meeting that evening and so there was no necessity for his meeting the Congress President. When Pant went to meet him in the evening, Jinnah asked him if he had any fresh proposal to make. On the former saying he had none, the meeting ended.

When the conference met on the 29th June, the Viceroy announced that since the parties were unable to come to an agreement about the composition and strength of the Government, he would use his personal offices to resolve the difficulty. He asked all interests represented in the conference to send him lists of persons they would like to be selected for joining the National Government. He would add to them some names himself and after scrutinising all the names, and after consulting with the parties concerned, he would try to arrive at a list which would be generally acceptable to the conference.

Jinnah was not agreeable to this proposal. He first wanted to know whether, if the League sent a list, the Viceroy would accept the League panel *en bloc*. The Viceroy replied that he could give no such guarantee beforehand. It was his function to do the final selection. But the conference would be given the opportunity to discuss and finally accept or reject the names recommended by him.

Jinnah next asked whether the Viceroy would still proceed with his proposal if one of the parties finally rejected it, to which again the Viceroy replied that he could not commit himself in advance as to what he would do in the contingency envisaged.

Finally, when the Viceroy asked him pointblank whether the League would submit the list of names or not, Jinnah answered that he was there only in his individual capacity; he would need the Viceroy's proposal in writing to place before the Working Committee of the League before he could give a definite reply. He was told he would have it.

The conference then adjourned for a fortnight.

All parties except the Muslim League submitted their list of names to the Viceroy. The European group decided not to submit any separate list on their behalf. The Congress submitted a panel of 15 names for the proposed Executive Council. The Congress felt that in order to give representation to as many minority communities as possible, the strength of the Executive Council—besides the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief—should be fifteen. The following was the Congress list of names:

1. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (Congress Muslim)
2. Asaf Ali (Congress Muslim)
3. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (Congress Hindu)
4. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (Congress Hindu)
5. Dr. Rajendra Prasad (Congress Hindu)
6. M. A. Jinnah (Muslim League)
7. Nawab Mohammad Ismail Khan (Muslim League)
8. Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan (Muslim League)

9. Dr. Shyamaprasad Mookerji (Hindu Mahasabha)
10. Gaganvihari Mehta (Hindu)
11. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur (Woman, Indian Christian)
12. Muniswami Pillay (Scheduled Class)
13. Radhanath Das (Scheduled Class)
14. Sir Ardeshir Dalal (Parsi)
15. A Sikh member (name to be submitted later).

Wrote Jinnah to Lord Wavell: "With regard to your suggestion for submitting a panel of names . . . the Working Committee (of the Muslim League) desires to point out that when a similar proposal was made by your Excellency's predecessor, Lord Linlithgow . . . the Working Committee opposed it and, when its objections were brought to the notice of Lord Linlithgow, he dropped the proposal and suggested another alternative." Lord Linlithgow's alternative was contained in the following letter of Lord Linlithgow to Jinnah dated 25th September, 1940: "I am content that the selection of representatives, while resting with the Governor-General, be based in the case of the Muslim League . . . not on a panel formally submitted but on confidential discussion between the leader of the party concerned and myself (the Viceroy)."[39] Concluding his letter Jinnah wrote: "The Working Committee is of the opinion . . . that the procedure settled on the previous occasion should be followed in the present case so far as the Muslim League is concerned."

Declining to submit the panel when the Viceroy showed his inability to agree to this procedure, he again wrote: "The Committee . . . desires me to state that it regrets very much to note that your Excellency is not able to give the assurance that all the Muslim members of the proposed Executive Council will be selected from the Muslim League . . . and, in the circumstances, I regret, I am not in a position to send the names on behalf of the Muslim League for inclusion in the proposed Executive Council."[40]

In the final meeting of the conference on the 14th July, the Viceroy revealed that even without receiving any list from the Muslim League he had formed an Executive Council on paper which he thought would be acceptable to the conference. But the Muslim names which he had proposed were not acceptable to Jinnah. The Viceroy, however, did not show his list to the Congress President even when asked, or to anyone else. Nor did the Viceroy place his list before the conference. He simply announced in the conference that the conference had failed to achieve its object. He, however, took upon himself the responsibility of the entire failure.

"It grieves me to think," wrote Gandhiji in his final letter to the Viceroy, "that the conference which began so happily and so hopefully should have ended in apparent failure—due exactly, as it would seem, to the same cause as before. This time you have taken the blame on your own shoulders. But the world will think otherwise. India certainly

does."[41] Probing into the cause of the failure he continued: "I must not hide from me the suspicion, that the deeper cause is perhaps the reluctance of the official world to part with power, which the passing of virtual control into the hands of their erstwhile prisoners would have meant."

It was a pity that the attempt to resolve the deadlock should have thus foundered upon the old rocks once again. Never was the country more prepared to accept a British offer for a settlement on its face value. The earlier declarations of the Viceroy had led the people to hope that a new beginning would be made this time. Where was the need for summoning an all party conference, they asked, if a Congress-League agreement was to be made a necessary condition for any advance, or if the Viceroy was not to go ahead with his plans if the League refused to co-operate? Why should not in that case the Presidents of the Congress and the League alone have been called and the rest spared the bother of a dummy show?

Jinnah, in a statement,[42] characterised the Wavell plan as "a snare" and "a death warrant" for the Muslim League because, even if all the Muslims in the Government were to be the Muslim Leaguers, they would still be in a minority of one-third in the Cabinet. The representatives of "all the minorities," Jinnah said, would "in actual practice, invariably . . . vote . . . against us" in the Government. Previously Jinnah used to say that the Muslim League was the champion and protector of all the minorities in India, and the Congress represented not even "Hindus" but "caste Hindus" only. But now he said: "All other minorities, such as Scheduled Castes, Sikhs and the Christians have the same goal as the Congress. . . . Their goal and ideology is . . . of a united India. Ethnically and culturally, they are very closely knitted to Hindu society." Surely, both the assertions could not be correct. Besides, one might well ask, how the Wavell plan would have ceased to be "a snare" and "a death warrant" even if the League's demand for nominating all the Muslims in the Cabinet from the Muslim League had been conceded.

In a penetrating analysis of the Quaid-i-Azam's attitude at the conference, Dr. Jayakar wrote to Gandhiji: "As I read this speech, where he called the Wavell arrangement a snare, it was clear to me that his apprehension (was) that . . . if he accepted the interim arrangement . . . in the day to day harmony of working the acerbities and animosities, out of which Pakistan is born and fed, would be gradually smoothened and Muslims would lose the zest for separate existence on discovering that its basis rests not in realities but only in long cherished suspicion. . . . He puts two conditions as precedent to his assent, which he must realise, are impossible, viz. (1) assurance about Pakistan and (2) equality of the Muslim vote with all the other interests in India. True to his habit, intensified by frequent successes, he swallows the concessions Muslims have received, viz., parity between caste Hindus and Muslims and

now wants parity between Muslims and all other interests put together, i.e., 50 for Muslims, 50 for all the rest of India—a mathematical monstrosity that 27 equals seventy-three. . . . He is in no hurry to attain freedom and would demand for its attainment a price which would almost render it nugatory."[43]

The net result of the conference was to introduce the formula of "caste-Hindu Muslim parity" into practical politics and to stereotype officially the principle of religious division on the eve of independence. The conference also marked the beginning of an essay, which became so prominent during the Cabinet Mission's negotiations later, in "double speak" in which the "intentions" of British statesmen were belied by the text of their declarations and what was repudiated in profession was pursued in practice through the device of the "ambiguous middle".

"You will admit," remarked Mr. Francis Sayer of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in the course of an interview with Gandhiji, "that Wavell did make an honest attempt to break the deadlock."

"An honest attempt should have ended honestly," Gandhiji replied.[44]

Confirmation followed a fortnight later in a letter received by Pandit Nehru from London: "It is now known that the Wavell offer was maintained in being as part of election necessities. Also that the final termination of the talks by Wavell, without taking the obvious course of forming a Government without Jinnah, was dictated from here."

CHAPTER VI

THE SENTINEL ON THE WATCH-TOWER

1

THE RELEASE of the Congress Working Committee brought Gandhiji a welcome respite from the burden of directing Congress work from day to day which in the absence of the Working Committee he had taken upon himself. Besides, "my advice, independently given, may be in conflict with their opinion and it may embarrass them and even put them or me in the wrong position. What is more it may confuse the public mind."[1] He, therefore, lost no time in announcing that thereafter he could give advice only through the Working Committee and its President. The relief thus afforded enabled him to devote himself to pursuits more after his heart.

Sardar Patel had come out of detention with shattered health. He was afflicted with spastic colon. A major operation was recommended but the risk involved was great. Gandhiji suggested to the Sardar that he should give nature cure a trial and, in order better to persuade him, offered to stay with him during the treatment. The Sardar agreed. In the third week of August, 1945, therefore, Gandhiji went to stay at Dr. Dinshah Mehta's Nature Cure Clinic at Poona along with the Sardar.

As had often happened in his life, this casual circumstance launched Gandhiji on another big venture of his life. When after three months' stay at the Nature Cure Clinic at Poona he returned to Sevagram, it was with another adopted child—the project of a nature cure university—on his hands! Dr. Dinshah Mehta, the founder-proprietor of the Clinic, was a nature-cure enthusiast and a dreamer like Gandhiji. Years ago, with his devoted wife he had dedicated himself to the cause of nature cure with the fervour of an evangelist. He wanted to set up a nature cure university. So did Gandhiji. Dr. Mehta made over his concerns at Poona and at Sinhagadh to a trust. Gandhiji agreed to become one of the trustees.

"At 76, people entrust even their household responsibilities to others and take *sannyas* and here you are taking upon your shoulders other people's responsibilities!" the Sardar joked. Gandhiji explained, nature cure had been a passion with him ever since his childhood. He could not pursue that dream in the midst of his other multifarious activities. "So, when Providence threw an opportunity in my way at Poona I seized it as a gift from God."

The trust deed was executed while Gandhiji was still at Poona. In a memorial signet-ring, which Dr. Mehta had prepared for the occasion, was enclosed the following legend signed by the doctor and his wife: "This seed we humbly put in your hands by this Trust, with fervent prayer to God that it may be nurtured by you into the nature cure university. We are convinced that His hand is behind the move. We are merely instruments of His will." Rather effusive one might say, but very characteristic of the evangelical fervour of the spirits whom Gandhiji drew to himself. "Cranks, faddists and madmen," he once remarked, "find their way to the Ashram, and I am the maddest of them all!"

As a first step towards the proposed transformation, Gandhiji announced that as from the first of January next, the Clinic would be run for the service of the poor and in a style befitting the poor. "The rich will be taken only if they can remain with the poor and expect no more space or comforts than the poor will get in the institution. The guarantee will be that the standard of cleanliness, shorn of luxury, will be the highest attainable in any institution of the kind."

To the assembled workers of the institution he put this question: Would they be prepared to adjust themselves to the change and serve the poor with the same attention and care as they bestowed upon the rich patients under their care? He asked for their considered reply in writing which they gave after two days, promising to do their best.

To give them a better idea of the changes involved, he made a tour of inspection of the Clinic. And that was a thing always to be dreaded. With his extraordinary sensitiveness to uncleanliness—whether physical or moral—he minutely examined every nook and corner and even wiped his fingers against the polished woodwork to see if they got any dirt stains on them, which alas! they did. "Well, I shall let it go this time," he said to the management, "but after I have taken over charge I shall certainly not excuse myself for any shortcomings in respect of cleanliness here." Everybody knew what "not excusing myself" meant. They would have preferred to mount the gallows!

A few days later, at Sevagram, he had another opportunity to bring home the same lesson. At Poona it was in the context of health, here it was in the context of education.

The widowed mother of a bright little boy of nine had joined the Ashram. The boy was sent to the residential Basic School in the Ashram. He agreed to attend the school on condition that Gandhiji would pay him a visit in his hostel.

Accordingly, Gandhiji paid a surprise visit to his chum's dormitory. A pen and ink-pot lying on a mat in the middle of the room caught his eye as soon as he entered the room. The ink-pot was rather messy. He examined the nib of the pen—it was scratchy; the cotton stuffing in a quilt in a bed-roll was lumpy; a torn bed-sheet was indifferently mended; some boys had insufficient winter clothing. He had intended to give

not more than five minutes to the visit. He spent forty-five instead, inspecting and explaining things. He set down his observations in a note later: "The torn bed-sheets should have been patched up or doubled and turned into a quilt; I did much blanket quilting whilst I was in prison in the Transvaal. Such blankets are warm and lasting. . . . Torn rags . . . should be washed and tidily kept. They can be used for patching torn clothes. . . . And, why should not those who have more than their requirement in winter clothing be taught to part with their superfluous clothing to those who are insufficiently provided? That would be a fine object-lesson in mutual aid."

"All these may appear to you to be trifles," the note proceeded, "but all big things are made up of trifles. My entire life has been built on trifles. To the extent to which we have neglected to inculcate the importance of little things on our boys, we have failed or rather . . . I have failed. For it was I who launched the experiment of Nai Talim but could not find time to conduct it myself and had to leave it to others. A sense of cleanliness, tidiness and sanitation, in my opinion, constitutes the very core of Nai Talim. To cultivate it involves no expense. All it needs is a keen, observant eye and artistic sense."

"If you tell me," the note concluded, "that in this way you cannot do justice to more than one or two boys, I will say, 'Then have one or two only and no more.' By undertaking more than we can properly manage, *we introduce into our soul the taint of untruth.*"

It was so typical of Gandhiji:

> "To see a World in a grain of sand,
> And a Heaven in a wild flower,
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And Eternity in an hour. . . ."

"I have today laid another brick in the edifice of Swaraj," he remarked later in the day, referring to the episode.

He brought to bear the same originality, concentration and close thinking on the elaboration of his new Khadi policy, which claimed the rest of his brief stay at Sevagram. He laid down that the managers of Khadi stores should not thereafter try to tempt customers to purchase Khadi by high-pressure salesmanship. They should convert their shops into living institutions for teaching the various techniques related to spinning and the ancillary processes, provide a liaison between self-spinners and weavers to enable the former to get their yarn woven into cloth for personal use, and stock accessories for those who might need them. "I would like us to acquire an extensive plot of land in . . . healthy, agreeable surroundings. . . . I would induce a variety of artisans and craftsmen to settle there and our Khadi workers, too, and in fact convert the site into a tiny model village which would serve as a living museum of resuscitated village crafts. In olden days the East India Company's

factory on the banks of the Tapti, they say, dominated the entire country-side round about Surat and the city of Surat itself. Your Khadi shop will be your factory, with this difference that the function of the East India Company's factory was to extirpate Khadi and our indigenous village crafts; your mission will be to revive and renovate them. You will become village-minded yourselves and try to produce all village products in the simple, villagers' way. You will make your establishment a centre of attraction to the city-folk, so that they will go there for their week-ends instead of fashionable pleasure resorts. Those who want to purchase Khadi will not only make their Khadi purchases but also taste the joy and satisfaction of simple, healthy village life in ideal village surroundings, besides learning spinning, carding etc., if they do not know them already."[2]

Did it mean that they must wash their hands of all responsibility towards the cities? he was asked.

They could not afford to conduct their activity, Gandhiji replied, to help the city-folk, who crowded at the race course, bridge-clubs, cinemas and theatres to deck themselves out. "We can only teach and help them to produce their own Khadi, if they are keen on it."

"Cities are the weakest sector in the Khadi front. Would not the presence of the cities' representatives on the Board of Trustees in the Spinners' Association be a source of weakness to the latter?" one of the workers asked.

"They won't be a weakening influence. . . . They would function as the outposts of the new Khadi policy in the cities. Today cities are exploiting the villages. They say, 'We are India.' A time must come when this process will be reversed. Your function should be to prepare the way for that day."

A veteran Khadi worker, who had settled down in a village near Bombay four years back, complained that he had so far failed to induce any local people to join him. The place was malarious and outside workers were unwilling to come and settle down there. What was he to do? he asked.

"It is not the word but the deed that grows," replied Gandhiji, quoting an American author. "Charity must begin at home. Why not induce members of your family to come and join you?"

"Suppose, they are unwilling?"

"Then you must be content to plough your lonely furrow. If you are adamant and stick to your resolve not to have any outside help, you will in due course get local men to help you. If you fall ill, get local people to nurse you. Tell your people that they must be prepared to come and settle there if they want to nurse you. And if the worst comes to the worst and you die, you must be content to be cremated by the local people. Unless you show that iron resolve to 'do or die', you will not be able to achieve success in your mission, which is nothing less than the

upliftment of the crores of the semi-starved masses of India, who are today sunk in a torpor of apathy and despair."

Explaining to the trainees of the village workers' training centre at Sevagram the ideals of village work, he asked them to remember that there was no room for compulsion or coercion in village uplift work. They had no sanction except that of Ahimsa, and Ahimsa moved at a snail's pace. But he was convinced more than ever that its march was irresistible. They would, therefore, need to have infinite patience and perseverance to win the confidence of the masses. They must become not merely artisans, but master craftsmen. A hereditary artisan might have more deftness of the hand; they would need to have more brains. They must become original thinkers and innovators in their line. "India is but a spot on the map of the world and Sevagram a tiny speck on that spot. But you need never lose heart if you bear in mind the fact that what can be achieved in Sevagram can be multiplied so as to cover the whole of India and what is possible for India should be possible for the whole world. Today you are a mere handful but if you are filled with the passion to identify yourselves with the hungry millions, to become one with them, so much so that you will not want to feed till their hunger is satisfied first, the fire within you will radiate its effect far and wide and your institution will become like the Gangotri, from which flows forth the mighty Ganges. It begins as a mere trickle, but as it progresses through the plains, hundreds of streams mingle with it and its life-giving waters cover the whole land with smiling prosperity."[3]

2

Gandhiji had thought that the drastic changes that he had proposed in the Nature Cure Clinic at Poona would suffice to convert it into the nucleus of the nature cure university of his dream. Eleven days' stay at the Clinic in February-March, 1946, however, proved it to have all been a mistake. "I was a fool to think that I could ever hope to make an institute for the poor in a town. I realised that if I cared for the ailing poor, I must go to them and not expect them to come to me. . . . How is a villager coming to Poona to understand and carry out my instructions? . . . He would expect me to give him a powder or a potion to swallow and be done with it. Nature cure connotes a way of life which has to be learnt. . . . The treatment to be efficacious can, therefore, only take place in or near a man's cottage or house. It demands from its physician sympathy and patience and knowledge of human nature. When he has successfully practised in this manner in a village, or villages, when enough men and women have understood the secret of nature cure, a nucleus for a nature cure university is founded."[4]

Had it been a case of an ordinary mistake, the matter would have ended there. But it was more. It was a part of his experiments with truth

and involved his spiritual relationship with the poor people, who were his tools in his experiments. He felt he must set himself right with them by a public confession and reparation. He wrote in *Harijan*: "It is plain to me . . . that I am incorrigible. I can learn only by my mistakes. I have just discovered myself making a mistake which I should never have made. . . . I do not know whether to laugh or weep over my folly. . . . My folly is so patent. . . . I do not know whether now I deserve the confidence of my fellowmen. If I lost it I know that I shall have deserved the loss."[5]

That did not mean abandonment of the experiment but on the contrary a clearer and more vigorous pursuit of the ideal of nature cure for the millions, "if such a thing is at all practicable. Possible it certainly is."[6]

Accordingly, in the last week of March, he moved to Uruli Kanchan, a small station on the Poona-Sholapur line, with a population of about three thousand. It had a railway-telegraph office and a post office but no telephone. The mail and the express trains did not stop there. The climate was good. There was a plentiful supply of filtered water from the military camp water-works nearby. The locality grew fruits like the guava, the orange and the papaya in abundance. Some friends promised to provide enough land for the purpose and donated ten thousand rupees to meet the initial expenses. A local retired railway contractor vacated his bungalow for Gandhiji's temporary residence. And so, the experiment commenced.

Patients began to come in from the very next morning. There were about thirty of them on the first day. Gandhiji examined five or six of them and prescribed to them all more or less the same treatment with slight variations according to the nature of each case, i.e., repetition of Ramanama, sun-bath, friction and hip-baths, a simple eliminative diet of milk, sour butter-milk, and fruit and fruit juices with plenty of clean, fresh water to drink.

Wrote Rajaji with his usual cynicism in the course of a letter to the Mahatma: "Rajkumari writes to say you are having a roaring practice at Uruli. I fear it may develop easily into a nuisance based on the superstition of the Mahatma's touch. Anyway, it is better than bad medicines!"[7]

Gandhiji explained to the people his rationale of nature cure: There is a unity of cure as there is of disease. "All mental and physical ailments are due to one common cause. It is, therefore, but natural that there should be a common remedy for them, too. . . . I, therefore, prescribed Ramanama and almost the same treatment to all the patients who came to me this morning."[8]

The number of patients increased to 43 on the third day. If the work proceeded according to plan, he announced to the people, he proposed to stay in their midst for at least four months in the year. During his

absence his colleagues would continue to direct and guide them according to his instructions. The practice of nature cure did not require high academic qualifications or much erudition, he explained. "Simplicity is the essence of universality. Nothing that is meant for the benefit of the millions requires much erudition. The latter can be acquired only by the few and, therefore, can benefit the rich only. But India lives in her seven lakhs of obscure, tiny, out-of-the-way villages. . . . I would like to go and settle down in some such village. That is real India, my India, for which I live. You cannot take to these humble people the paraphernalia of highly qualified doctors and hospital equipment. In simple, natural remedies and Ramanama lies their only hope."[9]

He warned the villagers that they should be prepared to find in him a hard task-master. If he stayed in their midst he would neither spare himself nor them. He would visit their homes, inspect their drains, their kitchens, their latrines. He would tolerate neither dust nor dirt nor flies anywhere.

The difference between the nature-cure system of his conception and other systems of cure, he explained, was this: In the latter the patient comes to the doctor to take the drugs that would cure him. With the relief of abnormal symptoms the function of the doctor ends and with that his interest in the patient. The nature-cure man does not "sell" the cure. He teaches the patient the right way of living, which would not only cure him of his particular ailment but also save him from falling ill in future. The ordinary physician is interested mostly in the study of disease. The nature-curist is more interested in the study of health. "His real interest begins where that of the ordinary doctors ends. The eradication of the patient's ailment under nature cure marks only the beginning of a way of life in which there is no room for illness or disease. Nature cure is thus a way of life, not a course of treatment."[10]

Again, a nature-cure man won't tell the patient, "Invite me and I shall cure you of your ailment." He will only tell him about the all-healing principle that is in every being and how he can cure himself by evoking it and making it an active force in his life. "If India could realise the power of that principle not only would we be free but we would be a land of healthy individuals, too—not the land of epidemics and ill-health that we are today."[11]

He admitted that nature cure could not cure all ailments: "No system of medicine can . . . or else we should all be immortals. But it enables one to face and bear with unperturbed equanimity and peace of mind an illness which it cannot cure."[12]

He expounded his philosophy of nature cure as follows: Man's physical body is composed of five natural elements, i.e., air, water, earth, fire or *tejas* (the energising principle), and ether (space). The soul quickens it. The science of natural therapeutics is based on a use of the same five elements as constitute the human body in the treatment of disease.

In practice it takes the form of hydropathy, massage and mud-baths, hot and cold mud-packs, sun-baths and air-baths etc. The elements, however, are not to be taken in their gross primary sense. They have a subtler significance. "*Pani* is not mere water . . . nor *vayu* wind or *prithvi* earth or *tejas* light. *Akash* is ether least of all. . . . All the five in the original are as living as life."[13]

The commentary on *akash* (ether) is interesting: "The mystery of this empty space all round us is most intriguing. We cannot solve it unless we can solve the mystery of God Himself. This much might be said that the more we utilise this great element *akash* the healthier we shall be. The first lesson to be learnt is . . . that we should not put any partition between ourselves and the sky—the infinite—which is very near and yet very far away. . . . To the extent to which we are able to approach this state in practice, we shall enjoy contentment and peace of mind. This train of thought taken to its logical conclusion leads us to a condition where even the body becomes an obstacle separating man from the infinite. To understand this truth is to become indifferent to the dissolution of the body. For to lose oneself in the infinite is to find oneself."[14]

The most potent weapon in the armoury of nature cure is Ramanama or the repetition of God's name. The potency of Ramanama is, however, subject to certain conditions and limitations. If, for instance, someone suffers from surfeit and wants to be cured of its after-effects, so that he can again indulge himself at the table, Ramanama is not for him. "Ramanama is for the pure in heart and for those who want to attain purity and remain pure. It can never be a means for self-indulgence. The remedy for surfeit is fasting, not prayer. Prayer can come in only when fasting has done its work. It can make fasting easy and bearable. Similarly, the taking of Ramanama will be a meaningless farce when at the same time you are drugging your system with medicines. A doctor who uses his talent to pander to the vices of his patient degrades himself and his patient. . . . Ramanama, on the other hand, purifies while it cures, and, therefore, it elevates. Therein lies its use as well as its limitation. . . . If you are subject to anger, eat and sleep for indulgence, not solely for sustenance . . . your recitation of it (Ramanama) is mere lip-service. Ramanama to be efficacious must absorb your entire being . . . and express itself in your whole life."[15]

While Gandhiji was greatly influenced by the writings of nature-curists like Louis Kuhne and Adolf Just, his outlook on nature cure was essentially spiritual. He implicitly believed in *mens sana in corpore sano*—a sound mind in a sound body. But he emphasised even more its converse—the outer must be a reflection and manifestation of the inner. For instance, as a nature-curist, he laid great emphasis on vegetarianism. But the basis even of his vegetarianism was more moral than physical. "We have vegetarians in the cow and the bull," he said addressing the London Vegetarian Society on the 20th November, 1931, "which are

better vegetarians than we are, but there is something much higher which calls us to vegetarianism. . . . Man is more than meat. It is the spirit in man for which we are concerned. Therefore, vegetarians should have that moral basis—that a man was not born to be a carnivorous animal, but born to live on the fruits and herbs that the earth grows. . . . Therefore, I think that what vegetarians should do is not to emphasise the physical consequences of vegetarianism, but to explore the moral consequences. . . . Vegetarians need to be tolerant if they want to convert others to vegetarianism. Adopt a little humility. We should appeal to the moral sense of the people who do not see eye to eye with us."

He subscribed to the view that all ailments are due to a violation of nature's laws and a return to nature is the road to health. Therefore, by shedding the sophisticated way of life, which has become identical with "modern living", man can regain health of body and mind. But his "natural man" was not the "noble savage" of the Romanticists. By return to nature he meant conforming to the law of one's essential being by the conquest of animality—which in the primitive state obscures its divinity—through the cultivation of spiritual discipline, without which man is but a brute:

. . . . unless above the self he can,
Erect himself, how poor a being is man!

* * *

As a corollary to Gandhiji's philosophy of nature-cure-cum-Ramanama was his theory of living upto 125 years. There is a passage in one of the Upanishads in which the various stages of a man's life are likened to the sacrificial rituals enjoined on a householder in different parts of the day. If a person eats, drinks, laughs and lives not for the satisfaction of the senses but only for the service of God, his life becomes a sacrament—an unbroken cycle of sacrifice—which disease, death or old age dare not enter or interrupt. Fasting or practice of austerity on the part of such a person will correspond to the *diksha* (initiation) of the sacrificer; eating, drinking and recreation to *upasada*, i.e., the nourishment taken at the time of the breaking of the fast "to prevent the vital air from going out"; laughter and enjoyment to the hymn of praise to the Lord of sacrifice which the sacrificer chants. When Yama or the god of death comes to claim the soul of such a person, he will say to Yama, "Don't you see, I cannot spare time from my sacrifice to accompany you? Interrupt not my sacrifice." And so, Yama turns back and he lives the full span of life (125 years) to complete his *yajna* (sacrifice).

Everyone has a right and should desire to live for 125 years while performing service without an eye to result, held Gandhiji. "The condition necessary for the realisation of the desire . . . is service in the spirit of detachment, which means complete independence of the fruit of action. . . . Without attaining that state of detachment, it is impossible to live to

be 125 years old. . . . The human body is meant solely for service never for indulgence. . . . Renunciation is life. Indulgence spells death. . . . Renunciation made for the sake of such service is an ineffable joy . . . which . . . springs from within and sustains life. In this there can be no room for worry or impatience."[16]

How did Gandhiji expect to realise this ideal in practice in view of the handicap of past errors in living from which nobody is completely free? The question was once raised by Mr. Ian Stephens of *The Statesman*, the leading English daily of Calcutta: "What about the legacy of one's past life? It cannot be written off the balance-sheet?"

"I have my answer for that," replied Gandhiji. "If my past conduct does not warrant the full span of life, no matter however correct my present life may be, I can still counteract the effect of past mistakes by attaining complete detachment between the mind and the body. Detachment enables one to overcome the effects of past faulty practice as well as the handicaps of heredity and environment. Normally speaking, every deviation from the rule of nature, whether ignorant or wilful, e.g., anger, ill temper, impatience, errors in conjugal life, exacts its toll. But there is this promise that if you have arrived at complete detachment, you can rub out all these. 'Except ye be born again, ye cannot have everlasting life.' Conversely, you can have everlasting life if you are 'born again'. . . . You can turn over a new leaf and begin life anew here and now; the past will not disturb its tenor provided you have completely severed yourself from it and its legacy by the axe of detachment."[17]

As a democrat, Gandhiji believed in denying himself what could not be shared with others. But as a reformer, he believed in going ahead and acting for himself without waiting for others. That sometimes created a semblance of conflict between his theory and practice. Referring to his philosophy of nature-cure-cum-Ramanama, which was claimed to have been conceived in the interest of the millions, a correspondent wrote to Gandhiji: "I do not understand how to rely on a spiritual force for my physical ailments. I am also not sure . . . if I am justified in praying for my salvation, when there is so much misery amongst my countrymen."

"If you get rid of malaria by taking quinine," replied Gandhiji in the columns of his weekly, "without thinking of the millions who do not get it, why should you refuse to use the remedy which is within you, because millions will not use it through their ignorance? May you not be clean and well because millions of others will not be so, ignorantly or, may be, even cussedly? If you will not be clean, out of false notions of philanthropy, you will deny yourself the duty of serving the very millions by remaining dirty and ill. . . . What, however, is true is that the taking of a pill or pills of quinine is much easier than gaining the knowledge of the use of Ramanama. It involves much effort as against the mere cost of buying quinine pills. The effort is worth making for the sake

of the millions in whose name and on whose behalf my correspondent will shut Rama out of his heart."[18]

And again: "I go so far as to say that if Ahimsa cannot be practised by the millions, I have no use for it for myself. But if they did not want to, although they could, I would hold on to it even if I were all alone. . . . Similarly, if it were open to me alone to desire and strive to live for 125 years, I would not entertain that desire. But everybody can and should desire to live for 125 years for the service of God and His creation."[19]

* * *

Nature cure as conceived by Gandhiji was co-extensive with life. A villager was one day brought to him at Uruli Kanchan with injuries on his body, received at the hands of thieves, who had taken away ornaments etc. from his house. That set him off to explain how the nature-cure principle could be applied to nature-curing thieves and other anti-social elements of their delinquency. There were three ways of dealing with the problem. The first was the stereotyped, orthodox way of reporting to the police. The second, which was followed by the general run of the village people, was that of passive acquiescence. This was reprehensible as it was rooted in cowardice. Crime would flourish, while cowardice would remain. "What is more, by such acquiescence we ourselves become party to the crime." The third way was that of Satyagraha. Instead of bearing ill-will towards a thief or a criminal and trying to get him punished, they should try to get under his skin, understand the cause that had led him into crime and try to remedy it. A thief or a criminal was not very different from themselves. The rich moneyed man who made his pile by exploitation and other questionable means, was no less guilty of robbery than the thief who picked a pocket or broke into a house and committed theft. Only the former took refuge behind the facade of respectability and escaped the penalty of law. The criminal was only an indication of the social malady. A Satyagrahi must, therefore, seek to cure him by curing himself. "He will not try to ride two horses at a time, viz., to pretend to follow the law of Satyagraha, while at the same time seeking police aid."[20] No police officer could compel a Satyagrahi to give evidence against a person who had confessed to him.

And, what applied to Uruli Kanchan applied to the whole of India. Speaking on the 26th anniversary of Lokmanya Tilak's death, in August, 1946, Gandhiji observed that in his opinion, nature cure was an essential ingredient in the building of the Swaraj of his conception. Training for true Swaraj presupposed the triple purification of body, mind and soul.

Gandhiji had to leave his Uruli Kanchan experiment unfinished when he was called away to Delhi at the end of March, 1946. Thereafter he could return to Uruli only once in August. But the theme of nature

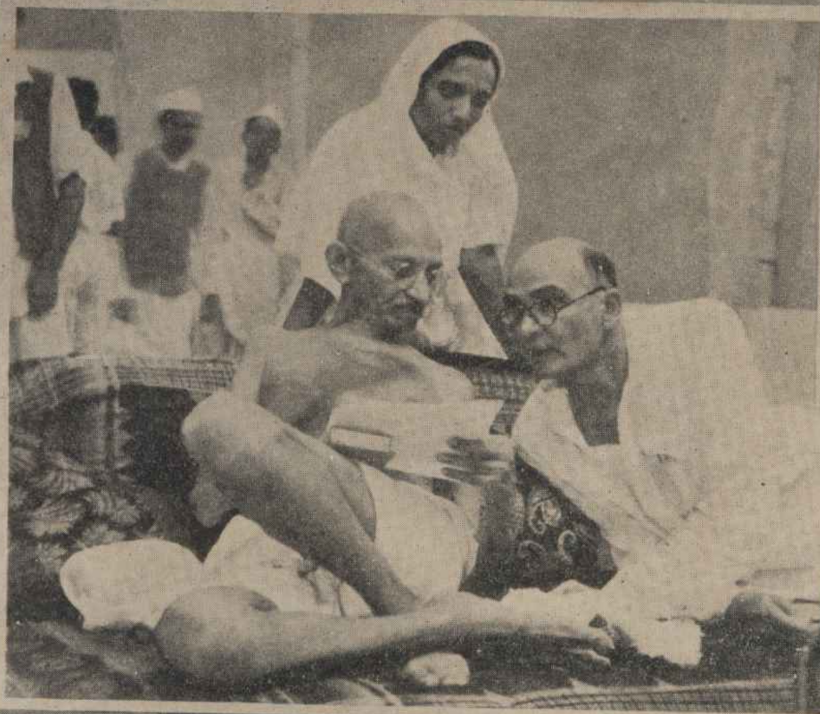
cure continued to grow on him and he continued to take an active interest in the work at Uruli till the very last. In November, 1947, when the tornado of communal passions threatened to overwhelm India, in a letter to a coworker he wrote from Delhi: "Please, tell all concerned at Uruli that it causes me both grief and satisfaction that I cannot be at Uruli. The satisfaction is derived from the fact that what I am doing here is also a part of the work at Uruli Kanchan. My nature cure covers both body and spirit. Therefore, according to my view, if I can bring back the people here to right thinking, it will have its effect even on our work at Uruli and provide an outstanding demonstration of the application of nature cure. Nature cure, village uplift and the Ashram way of life . . . according to my definition of nature cure, make an indivisible whole. The acme of nature cure is all-round village uplift, and nature cure for the villages without the Ashram way of life is to me inconceivable. . . . Therefore, anyone who is not prepared to adjust himself to Ashram life is, in my opinion, of no use for our work."[21]

On another occasion Gandhiji remarked: "Whichever institution I take up, I turn into an Ashram. It seems I know no other trade." Since "man is the measure of all things", the nature-cure ideal to Gandhiji became identified with the final goal of all his social and political activities viz., the establishment of a society of healthy individuals with healthy instincts and healthy mutual relationships. Nature cure thus embodied his dream of the perfectability of man and society symbolised by the legend of the Golden Age in all climes and ages. He gave it the name Rama Rajya—the Kingdom of God on earth, or the Swaraj of his dreams. And since to realise it in Indian society, as he found it, was the goal of his striving, his Ashram—where he had gathered round him men and women of ordinary clay to translate into everyday practice, under his guidance, the hoary wisdom of the basic spiritual disciplines on which India's ancient culture rests—became the pivot and fulcrum of all his activities.

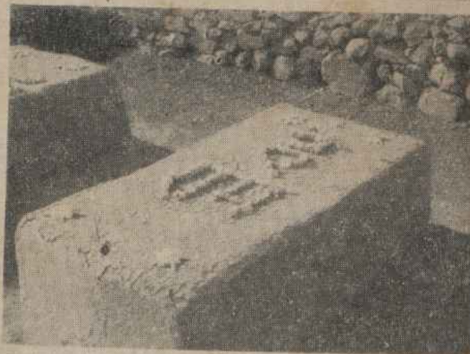
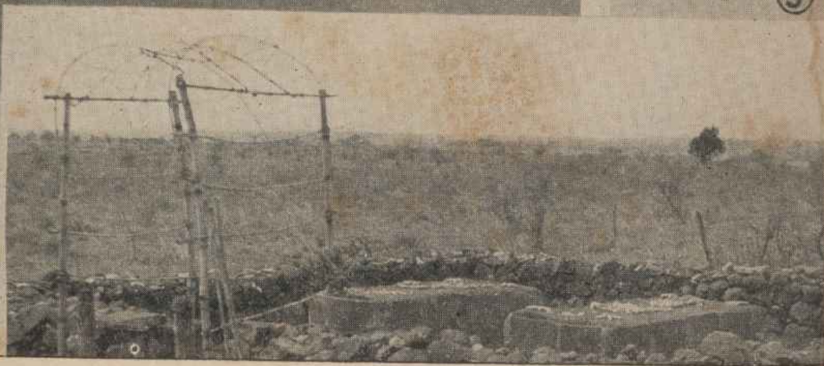
3

The general elections of July, 1945, in Great Britain registered a big swing to the left. The Conservatives were defeated and Labour came into power with a sweeping majority, the most notable casualty being Mr. Amery, the die-hard Secretary of State for India.

The election results showed that there was an overwhelming majority in Britain in favour of terminating the British rule in India. Lord Pethick-Lawrence, the new Secretary of State for India, was an old friend of Gandhiji's of some forty years' standing. Congratulating him on his appointment, Gandhiji wrote: "If the India Office is to receive a decent burial and a nobler monument is to rise from its ashes, who can be a fitter person than you for the work?"[22]



8th Aug. '42 Bombay

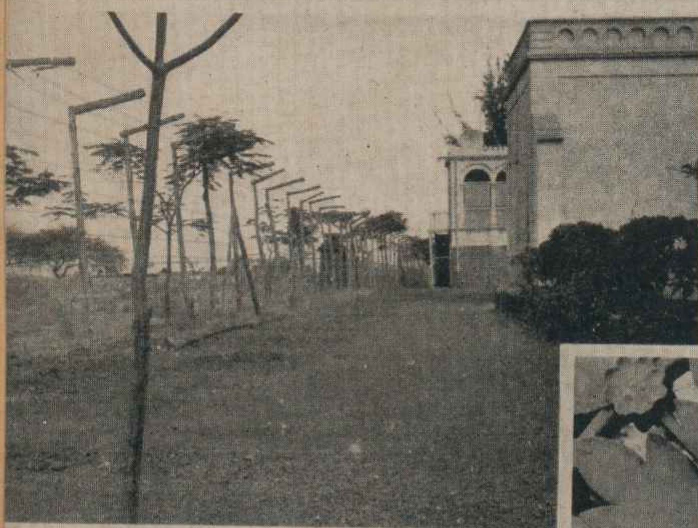
The two who did not return. "They have become immortal." (page 4) [ONE
1. Mahadev Desai with Gandhiji. 2. Kasturba Gandhi. 3, 4 & 5. Their Samadhis.

(1)



(4)





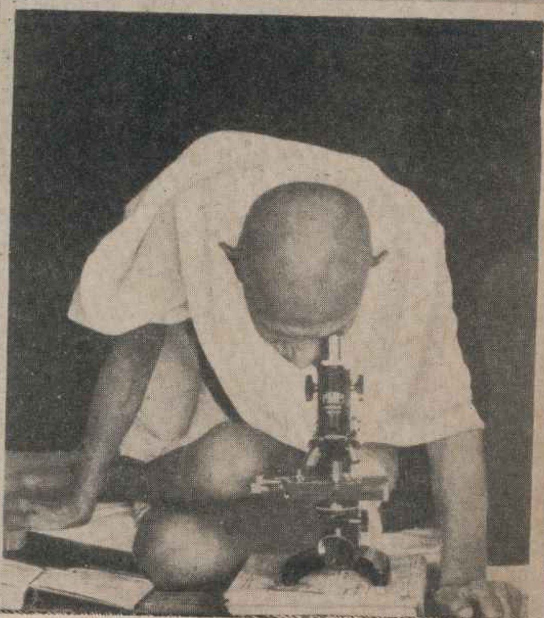
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TWO] 1, 2 & 3. "Behind. . .the barbed-wire isolation of the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp." (page 10) 4. Last prayer at the Samadhis of their departed comrades. (page 13)





1. "Symbol of India's unconquered and unconquerable soul." (page 10). 2. First public prayer after release at Parnakuti. 3. "Convalescence proved to be slow. . . He had come out. . .with hook-worm and amœbic infections." (page 15)

(1)

The oppression
was the fancied
or real control
of the doctors
rather than the
mind. I believe
I have freed my
self from the
doctors' control.
It does not matter
if the freedom is
imaginary or
imagined. The

(2)

effect on me
is the same. What
ever I may now
do will be due
either to my weak
-ness or strength.
Next fortnight
will show us
all what is
in store for
me & us. I am
approaching the

(3)

2 (1)

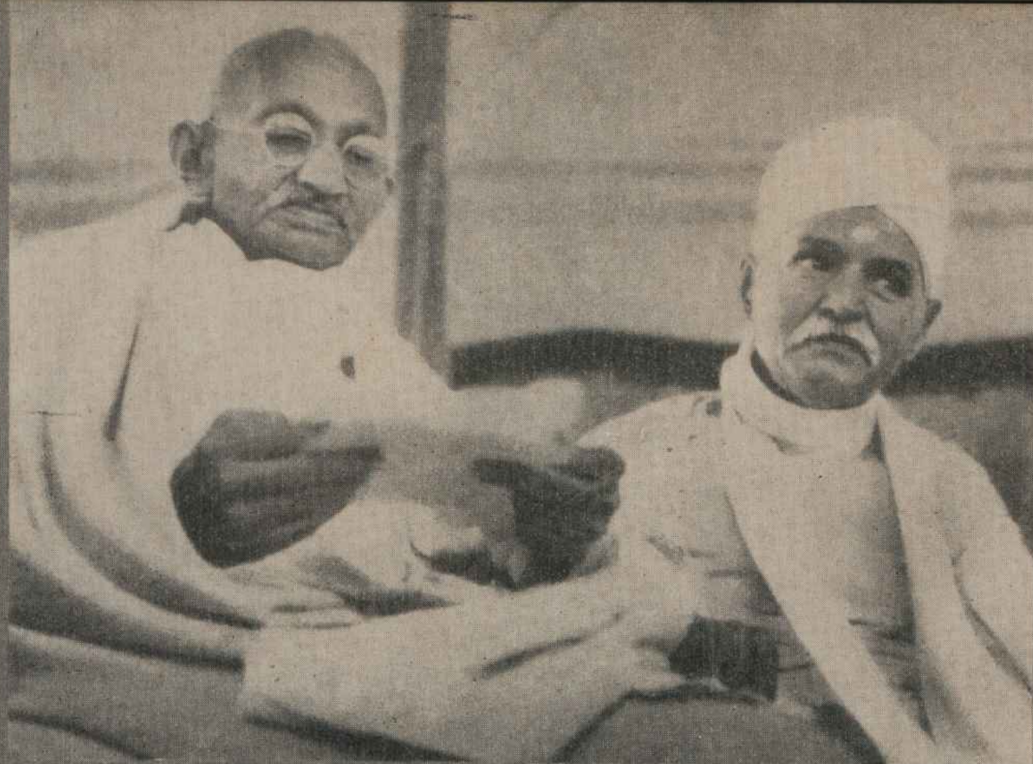
the thing with
a detached mind.
The difference
is this. If I have
the strength
of mind which I
announced
yesterday will
~~abide~~ If the
mind has become
weak I ~~shall~~ do
not know to what

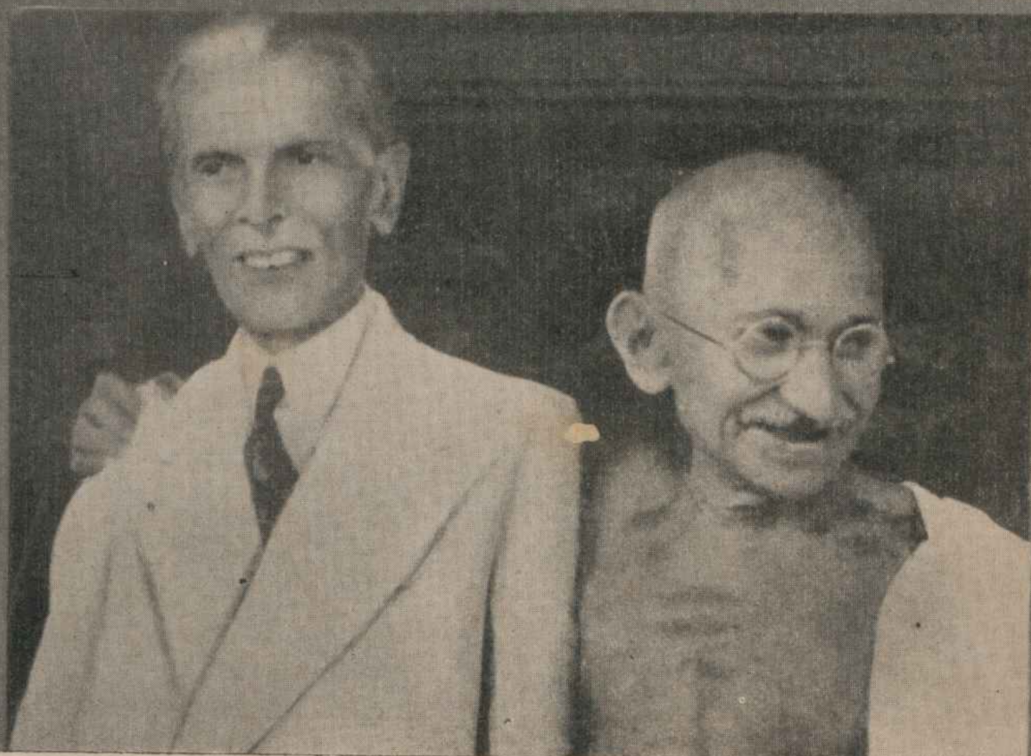
(4)

3 (1)

what extent
I shall <u>go</u>-
If the medicine
is the ~~only thing~~
least thing
you are safe
& I am safe.
About visitors
I shall be
stricter than
the doctors have

FOUR] "A very fiend of destruction so far as papers and documents. . .were concerned." (page xxii) These scribblings by Gandhiji preserved by the author give in part the story of Gandhiji's tussle with the doctors. (page 15)





1. Gandhiji and Malaviyaji. "At a stroke you have cut off twenty-five years. Add twenty-five to yours!" (page 14) 2. The Communal Triangle. "Brother Jinnah . . . Dear Mr. Gandhi." (page 68)

So I shall [redacted]
look out for
you by the
time you men
tion - what is
the meaning of
looking out
for you?
So you may
feel it that

①

why. I want
that danger
also. I have
to compare
notes about
several things
Then we
shall laugh
together & faith

②

③

This is the
beginning of
the laugh
we shall
abandon
ourselves to
in Sevagram.

④

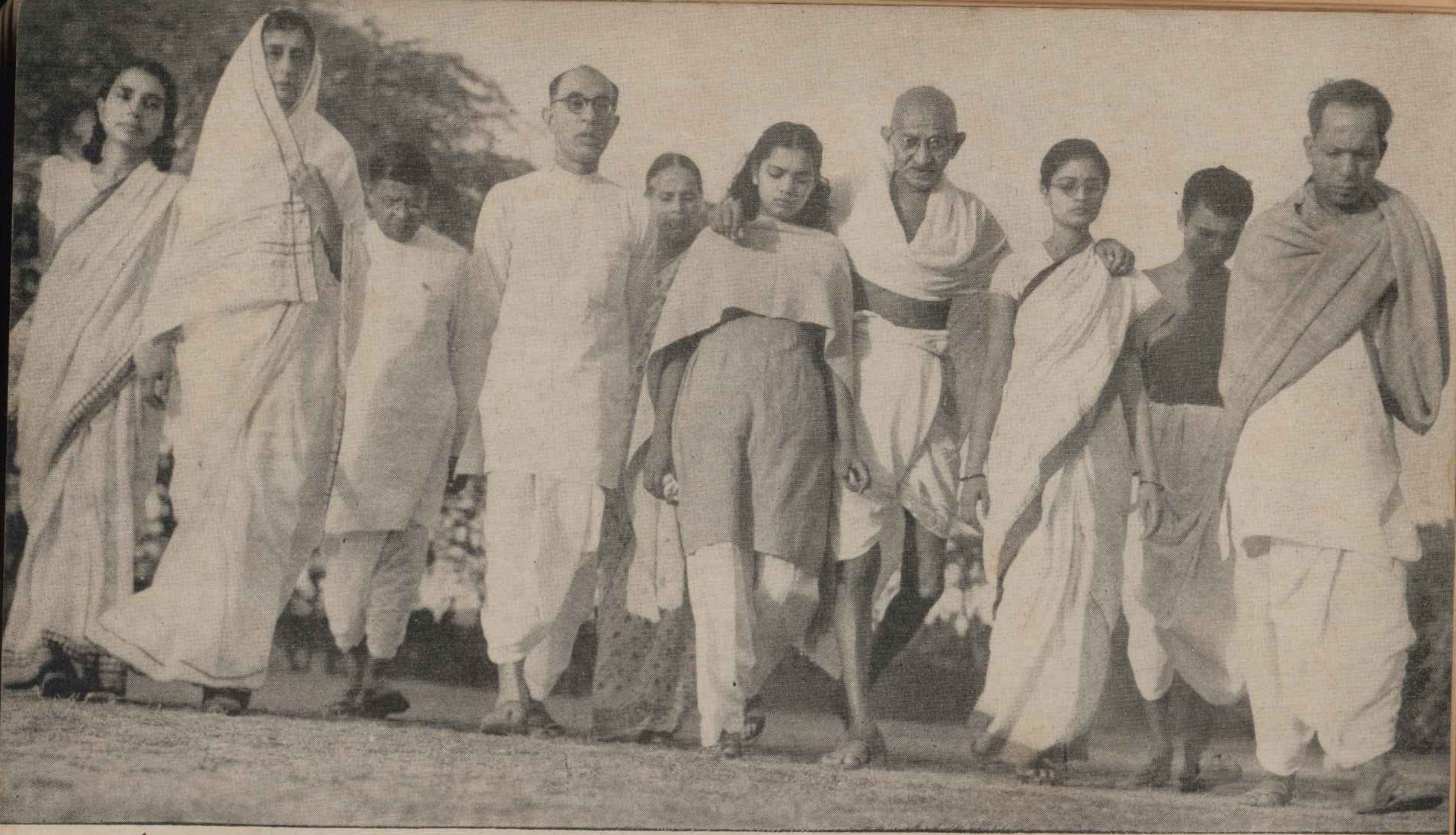
Now I am
going to leave
you if I am
also to love you

SIX] "Now I am going to leave you if I am also to love you!"—a tournament of wit between Gandhiji and Rajaji. (page 64)





1. Gandhiji returning from his meeting with Lord Wavell at Simla in July 1945. "An honest attempt should have ended honestly." (page 132)
2. Tussle with the crowds outside the Viceregal Lodge.



EIGHT] *Gandhiji with his "family"*. From right to left : Brijkishan Chandiwala, Kanu Gandhi, Abha Gandhi, Gandhiji, Sita Gandhi, Sushila Pai, the author, Manilal Gandhi, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Sushila Nayar.

(1)

(2)



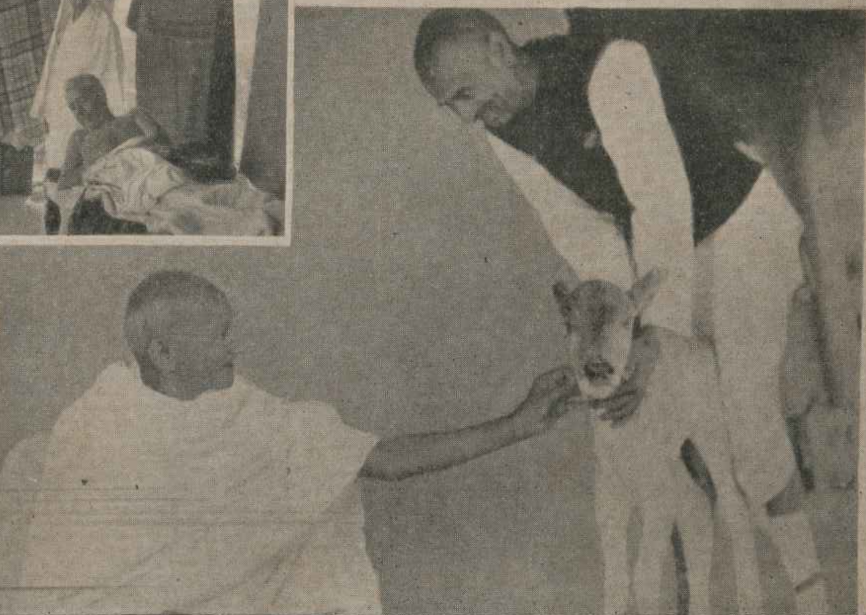
"It is to be seen what Sevagram can do for me." (page 238). 1. Accompanied by Chimanlal Shah (left) and Sushila Nayar (right) Gandhiji going out for community spinning. 2. His hut at Sevagram.



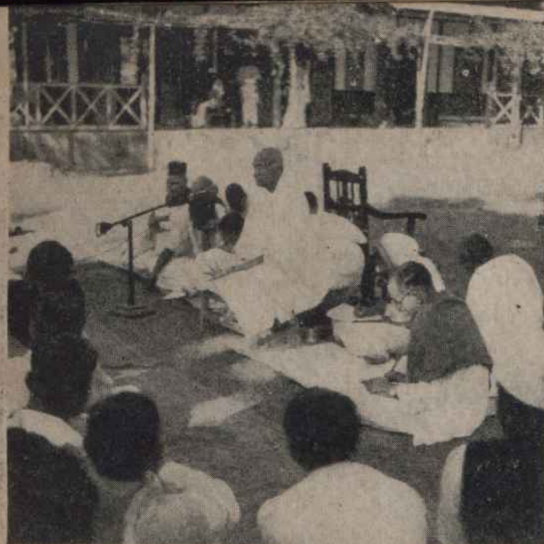








Life at the Ashram. 1 & 2. Gandhiji at work. 3. Attending the sick. Lying in bed is his old friend from South Africa Herman Kallenbach. 4. Birthday of a child, and 5. of a calf.

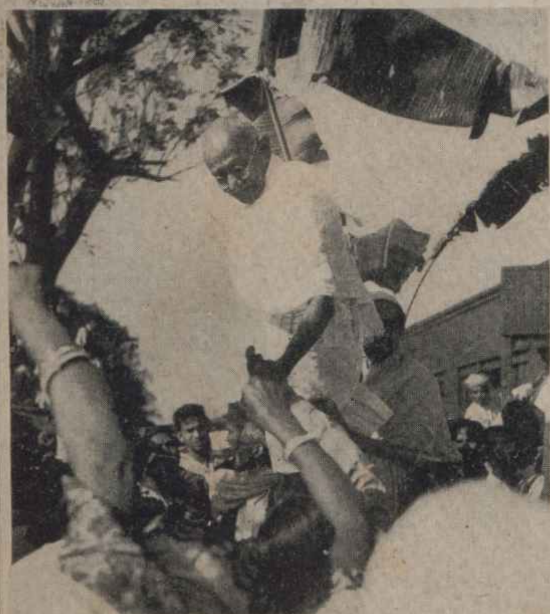


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(6)

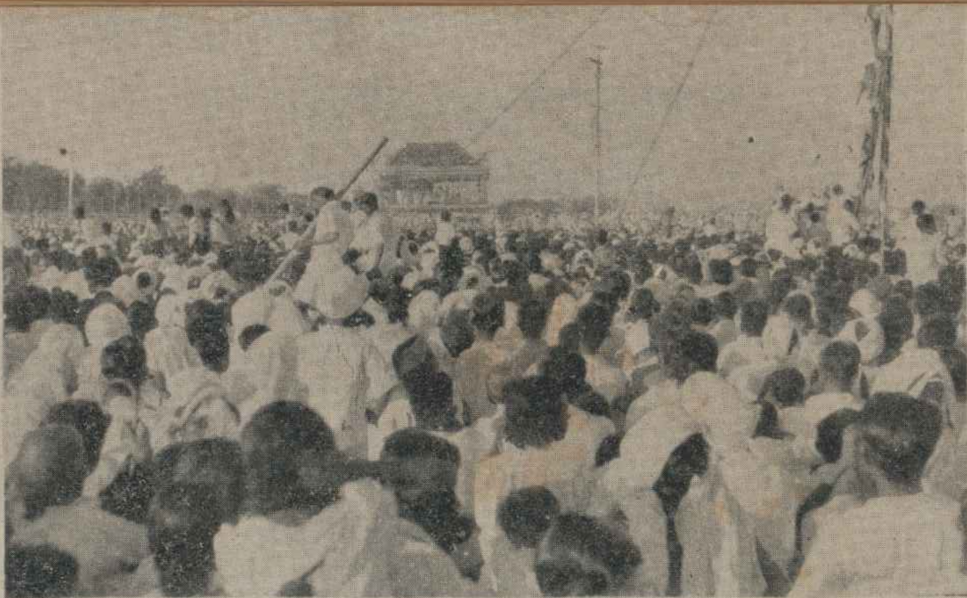




Studies in Crowd Behaviour, (page 155) 1 & 2. Addressing a gathering of women in Assam. 3 & 4. Addressing a crowd from the steamer on the bank of the Brahmaputra. 5. Collecting Harijan Fund during railway journey. 6. Coming out of Dum Dum Central Prison after interviewing security prisoners.

(1)





(3)

(2)



(4)



TWELVE] *Studies in Crowd Behaviour.* Right & left. At the Minakshi temple at Madura. (page 156) 3 & 4. The monster gathering at Madura with the Palni hill in the background. "Had I waited. . .this particular crowd would have learnt. . .perhaps. . .the discipline needed for Swaraj." (page 156)

Lord Pethick-Lawrence replied: "I greatly hope that our personal friendship, which has existed for so many years, may bear fruit in harmonious cooperation in achieving the lasting good of India and her people."[23]

The new Labour Government invited Lord Wavell to London in the last week of August, in order to review the whole Indian problem *de novo* in consultation with him. At the same time an announcement was made in India that elections to the Central and Provincial Legislatures, so long postponed owing to the war, would be held during the coming cold weather. On Lord Wavell's return from London, a statement was put out in India on the 19th September, 1945, announcing the intention of His Majesty's Government and the Viceroy, immediately after the elections to the Central Assembly and in the Provinces were over, to (1) invite the resumption of ministerial responsibility in the Provinces, (2) convene a constitution-making body as soon as possible, and (3) reconstitute the Viceroy's Executive Council with the support of the main Indian parties.

While the country was busy with the preparations for the elections, Gandhiji set out on his long deferred visit to Bengal. Ever since his release in May, 1944, he had been anxious to visit Bengal, where nature had conspired with man to fill the cup of the people's misery to the brim. But a Muslim League Ministry was in power in Bengal and a common friend had reported that while Khwaja Nazimuddin, the Chief Minister, would very much like Gandhiji to visit Bengal, he felt nervous lest his visit might have the effect of bringing about the fall of his Ministry. Gandhiji said he had no desire to embarrass the Muslim League Ministry of Bengal in any way and would not go there till the League Ministry invited him. In March, 1945, the Nazimuddin Ministry fell, on the failure of the Government to get a major item of the budget passed in the Assembly, and as there was no prospect of an alternate stable Government being formed, Mr. Casey, the war-time Australian Governor of Bengal, took over the administration under Section 93 of the Government of India Act.

After the leaders' conference at Simla in July, 1945, Mr. Casey sent word to Gandhiji that he would welcome Gandhiji's visit to Bengal. In the changed circumstances, Gandhiji decided that he would go to Bengal provided he was free to visit Midnapore district, which had been the scene of indescribable havoc as a result of a cyclone, floods, famine and governmental repression, and to meet whomsoever he might want without let or hindrance. On a satisfactory reply being received from Mr. Casey, Gandhiji set out for Bengal on the 30th November, 1945.

To avoid the experience of his previous train journeys, a loudspeaker was fixed to a coach some compartments away from his so that people at the distant-end of the train might be able to hear words spoken in the microphone without besieging Gandhiji's compartment. But

the instrument struck work, and at one of the very first big halts thousands of people who had been waiting for *darshan* for hours together in the inclement weather, after walking long distances, were keenly disappointed. They gave vent to their enthusiasm by donating liberally to the Harijan fund, which Gandhiji was in the habit of collecting wherever he went, for the service of Harijans but more than that for the education of the people for the removal of untouchability. Donations were sometimes followed by the auction of souvenirs, addresses etc. received. A silver tray, after fetching Rs. 4,500 on the spot in three successive auctions, returned to the Mahatma for the fourth time and stayed with him. At another station a woman loaded with gold and silver ornaments inched her way through the crowd into his compartment, took off her ornaments and laid them at his feet saying, "Mahatmaji, give me faith." "God alone can do that; he who seeks it finds it," replied the Mahatma.

The meeting with Mr. Casey in Calcutta was like an oasis in the desert of long estrangement with British officialdom since the latter had declared war on the Congress. They took to each other at their very first meeting and "some pretty rapid cross-fire correspondence on the several subjects . . . with each of us a little irritable"[24] which followed their discussions deepened rather than diminished their mutual liking. The Bengal Governor's only complaint was that when the Mahatma adopted the "pleasant habit" of addressing him at the start of his letters as "Dear friend" and wrote in a hurry, "it seemed to get perilously near to 'Dear fiend' !" "But," he hastened to add, "I may have been unduly sensitive."[25] Summing up his impression of the Mahatma later Mr. Casey recorded: "Amongst saints he is a statesman, and amongst statesmen a saint. Mr. Gandhi's greatest asset is his warm humanity. . . . He can make his point publicly with an opponent and yet leave his opponent without any feeling of bitterness—when he likes. . . . Gandhi seldom, if ever, speaks ill of any man. I discussed several men with him who had used him harshly but he managed to find some good to say of them and no ill. . . . He trusts those who trust him."[26]

In the course of their meeting Mr. Casey suggested that Gandhiji should persuade the Indian leaders to moderate their utterances over which New Delhi had developed a hyper-sensitiveness. "If no solution is arrived at this time, it would be a big tragedy. Surely, nobody wants that."

"Certainly not," Gandhiji replied. "But if you expect India to receive freedom as a gift and feel grateful for it, you are very much mistaken."

Mr. Casey remarked that the deadlock could be resolved if Gandhiji helped. Gandhiji told him that they would find him of little help if they had not firmly made up their mind to do full, unqualified and unconditional justice by India. Casey assured Gandhiji that independence

was coming. It was no longer a matter of years but months. The British had made up their mind. Gandhiji answered that in that case the coming events should cast their shadow before. For instance, there was the question of the release of political prisoners. Casey said he had already released many of them, only 290 or so remained. "The rest will be for you to see when you take over." "Why leave it to the National Government?" Gandhiji argued. "Why not forestall it? It will take all grace out of it if things are done haltingly or too late." The Governor saw his point. The tempo of releases after that was speeded up and by the middle of March, 1946, only 115 persons remained in detention.

Mr. Casey discussed his irrigation and development projects with Gandhiji and sent him an advance copy of a broadcast address he had prepared on the subject. Gandhiji told him that they were all long-term plans and while they were all right in their place, the millions in the meantime must be taught to utilise every minute of their idle time. "Regard human labour more even than money and you have an untapped and inexhaustible source of income which ever increases with use."[27] He put forward his scheme of hand-spinning and hand-weaving as a means for immediate utilisation of human effort and remedying what Mr. Casey had described as "the biggest problem of unemployment in the world".[28]

Mr. Casey argued that even if such a scheme was put into effect, "it would not do what irrigation would do—it would not free the cultivator from the thraldom of the monsoon—or the many other disabilities arising out of the lack of irrigation" and, therefore, he was justified "in laying all the stress that I can on the control of physical environment as fundamental to the prosperity" of Bengal.[29]

Gandhiji told him that he had not discounted the irrigation schemes. "If the waters of the rivers can be captured and utilised by the people of Bengal, instead of being wasted in the Bay, it would be a great gain."[30] But if the people were taught first the art of how to utilise their idle time, they would be able to make good use of the captured waters. He had only suggested, he said, an addition to the irrigational scheme so as to bring almost immediate individual relief to the villagers. "The acid question is one of utilising waste labour . . . under your scheme it is one of utilising waste water."[31]

But here he encountered Mr. Casey's blind spot. Commented the Bengal Governor later that he found it "waste of time . . . trying to argue against his views" on this point.[32]

Gandhiji rounded off his advice to Mr. Casey by suggesting that in view of the British declarations about coming changes, all development projects that the authorities had in hand should be prepared and worked out in consultation with the people. Nothing, however beneficial, should be imposed from outside. "Independence is not going to descend from the sky. It has to spring from the soil."

They came to the communal question. Mr. Casey stressed the need of conceding to the Muslims all the guarantees that they might ask for to allay their fears. Gandhiji told him, all that he had done within the bounds of reasonableness. Mr. Casey assured Gandhiji that the British Government were determined not to allow Jinnah to hold up political progress this time.

"A good man," remarked Gandhiji to Pandit Nehru after his meeting with Casey. "He reminds me of Smuts."

"They are all good men but their premises are all wrong," replied Pandit Nehru in his usual debonair manner. "The question of goodness, therefore, does not arise."

Mr. Casey had also arranged a meeting between Gandhiji and Lord Wavell during the latter's forthcoming visit to Calcutta. The meeting proved a flop. Lord Wavell's speech on the eve of the meeting before the Associated Chambers of Commerce in Calcutta was as bad as it could be, replete with effete, outworn formulas of the old regime and giving not the slightest indication of an awareness of the changes which Casey had been trying to assure Gandhiji were in the offing. "Quit India will not act as the magic sesame," the Viceroy said, "which opened Ali Baba's cave. There are various parties to the settlement who must somehow or other reach a measure of agreement among themselves—the Congress . . . the minorities . . . the Muslims . . . the Rulers of Indian States . . . the British Government."

The only solution of the Indian question, Gandhiji told Lord Wavell in the course of their 30 minute interview, was for the British to realise that they had no moral right to hold on to India and dispense "monkey justice". They must hand over power to whichever party was ready to take charge, and quit. Lord Wavell complained about the "strong" speeches which the Congress leaders were delivering. Gandhiji told him that there should be no sensitiveness on that score if they had really decided to go.

Did Gandhiji then doubt British *bona fides*? Wavell asked.

Was there not enough reason for it after their repeated experience of broken British pledges? asked Gandhiji in return. The Viceroy categorically denied that the British had broken any pledges. They were prepared to hand over power straightaway if the Indian parties could agree among themselves. Gandhiji told him that in that case the settlement of the Indian question would have to wait till the Greek Kalends. "If you say that so long as there is no unanimity among the Indians you will stay on, there can be no basis for a settlement, for you won't allow it."

Casey's well-meaning effort left him with burnt fingers. A communique about the Viceroy-Gandhi meeting that was proposed to be issued by New Delhi said that "the Viceroy had agreed to see Mr. Gandhi". The text of the communique being shown to Gandhiji, he pointed out

that he had not made any request for an interview as he had nothing new or useful to say to the Viceroy at that stage, and the communique would have, therefore, to be suitably amended. He suggested the necessary change but it was not acceptable to New Delhi. Mr. Casey thereupon proposed to New Delhi that they could set him down as the "villain of the piece" and say that the suggestion that the Viceroy and Gandhiji should meet had come from Casey and that both the parties had agreed to it. But New Delhi was not agreeable to that either. Ultimately a statement was issued unofficially from Calcutta under the date-line "New Delhi" (! ! !) explaining that there had been some misunderstanding between Calcutta and New Delhi and that Gandhiji had really not sought the "interview"!

The Private Secretary to the Viceroy afterwards explained their difficulty. The Viceroy was sincerely under the impression that when Casey had suggested to him to meet Gandhiji, he was conveying to him Gandhiji's request. They could not afford to say, said the Viceroy's Secretary, that the Viceroy had sent for Gandhiji, because that would have created the impression that the Viceroy had opened negotiations with the Congress and would have further raised the issue, why Jinnah and the representatives of other minorities had not been invited.

Much ado about nothing? Hyper-sensitiveness to considerations of "prestige"? No, it was something more portentous. Through the morning mists that filled the dawn of independence was beginning to loom the spectre of "parity" whose sinister significance nobody in India had yet fully grasped.

* * *

A meeting of the Congress Working Committee had been fixed up in Calcutta in the first week of December, during Gandhiji's visit to Bengal. The main item on the agenda was the election manifesto. Gandhiji felt that the best preparation for the elections was for the Congress to set its own house in order. As Gandhiji saw it, the Congress had attained its unrivalled position in the country as a result of its policy of non-violence. It could rise to still greater heights by further developing that policy. But in that regard it seemed to be retrogressing instead of advancing. Gandhiji had deliberately said not a word that might be construed as a condemnation of anything that the people had done after the arrest of the Congress leaders in August, 1942. But the Congress, he strongly felt, could not afford to keep silent over it. It was high time that for the people's future guidance it made a clear pronouncement as to whether some of the activities that had featured in the course of the "Quit India" struggle fell within the ambit of the Congress policy of non-violence and whether the freedom struggle could be helped by such activities.

Then there was the question of the election expenses. Gandhiji said that real victory of the Congress would be only if they won without

spending a pie. He did not mind risking defeat by sticking to that principle.

Finally, he recorded his firm opinion that they could generate the strength of Satyagraha only by constructive work. There were some members who wanted the resolution on constructive work to be split into two parts. Their point was that there was no integral relation between constructive work as defined by Gandhiji and the Congress policy of non-violent mass action. Gandhiji strongly disagreed.

The bulk of Gandhiji's recommendations were adopted by the Working Committee. Its resolution on non-violence ran:

The Working Committee...affirm for the guidance of all concerned that the policy of non-violence adopted...by the Congress...does not include burning of public property, cutting of telegraph wires, derailing trains and intimidation. The Working Committee are of opinion that the policy of non-violence as...explained and expanded from time to time, and action in accordance with it, has raised India to a height never attained before. The Working Committee are further of opinion that the constructive activities of the Congress, beginning with the spinning-wheel and Khadi as the centre, are emblematic of the policy of non-violence, and that every other Congress activity, including what is known as the Parliamentary programme, are subservient to and designed to promote the constructive activities as explained by Gandhiji. The Working Committee are of opinion that civil disobedience, mass or any other, meant for the attainment of freedom is inconceivable without the adoption of the constructive programme on the widest scale possible by the masses of India.

A few days later Maulvi Fazlul Huq, the ex-premier of Bengal, dubbed as "Sher-i-Bengal" or the Bengal tiger by his admirers, came to Gandhiji. An ardent Muslim Leaguer at one time, he had since been expelled from the League consequent on his refusal to toe the Jinnah line. The election fever in Bengal was at its height. The Maulvi Saheb complained of the rowdyism of the partisans of the Muslim League at election meetings. The Government was giving no adequate protection. He had himself on one occasion escaped by the skin of his teeth by taking shelter in a Hindu house.

Gandhiji sympathised with him and brought his complaints to the attention of the Governor. But he told the Maulvi Saheb that all that showed that Muslim sympathy was with the League, otherwise the League rowdies would not be able to make much headway. The Maulvi Saheb argued that it was not a sign of public sympathy with the League but only of public apathy. The average citizen was by nature timid and followed the line of least resistance. Gandhiji dissented. His own impression, he said, was that those who complained of public apathy had themselves been apathetic towards the public. They had done precious little to cultivate public opinion by working among the people. Their neglect was now recoiling upon them. It was no use crying over

spilt milk. A dignified course, if they were afraid of the rowdies and Government gave them no protection, was to withdraw from the elections after publicly stating their reasons. If as a result Pakistan came, they should face that risk and meet it by the power of non-violent non-cooperation which, with all their shortcomings in its practice, had brought them to the threshold of freedom in the teeth of Great Britain's armed might. It would either end Pakistan or mend it by sterilising it of its evil.

4

Rabindranath Tagore before his death had laid on Gandhiji's shoulders two burdens, namely, to do something for the finances and take a closer interest in the administrative affairs of Santiniketan. It was here that Gandhiji and his advance party of the Phoenix settlers had found asylum on their return from South Africa. Gandhiji had not been able to visit it since the Poet's death. In the third week of December, 1945, he set out to make a pilgrimage of it.

It was nearing evening prayer time when the train bringing him and the party drew up at Bolepore station. The platform in front of his carriage-door had been decorated by artistic designs in various colours in the traditional Indian style. A touch of art joined to simplicity marked every detail of the reception. There was no shouting, no jostling. A deep, subdued emotion suffused the scene. It had all the poignancy of a family re-union after a sad bereavement.

Dusk was falling. Gandhiji was taken straight to the prayer meeting which was held in a clearing surrounded by thick groves. The interlacing festoons of green leaves and bunting fluttered noiselessly overhead as the evening breeze sighed among the still, silent groves. The soft music of Gurudev's songs, with burning incense, filled the gloaming of the eventide with a solemnity all its own.

In a short discourse after the prayer Gandhiji likened Gurudev to a parent bird under the protecting shadow of whose outspread wings their institution had grown to its present size. "We all miss the warmth of his protecting wings. But we must not grieve. . . . All mortals must quit one day. . . . It is now for you workers and inmates of Santiniketan collectively to represent his ideal."

The weather was glorious with a mild nip in the air, and a full winter moon shone in the cloudless blue overhead, when next morning the party were woken up by the singing of *vaitalik* by the boys and girls of Santiniketan going the round of the Ashram grounds and ending up with a final chorus and salute under the window of the room in the *Udichi*, where the Poet used to sit and work.

Addressing the students of the institution at their weekly congregation in the *mandir*, where the Poet used to deliver his weekly sermon,

Gandhiji remarked on the haphazard way in which he had noticed the boys and girls sat and told them that it was of supreme importance that they should bear the *imprimatur* of Santiniketan even in the "littlest of their little acts". They had to become torch-bearers of the central message of the Poet's teaching, viz., peace and universal brotherhood which knew no racial barriers or distinctions based on caste, creed or colour. It was Gurudev's mission to deliver the message of peace to an aching world. It was for the boys and girls of Santiniketan, therefore, to go forth into the world as the warriors of peace battling for it so that Santiniketan might become "an abode of peace in fact, as it is in name". This required that they should have a living faith in God. "As the sculptor's genius informs a piece of marble and makes it live, so must the spirit of Gurudev live and propagate itself through you."

When a great and towering personality passes away leaving an orphaned institution behind, the question always arises, who can or should take his place. Answering this question in a meeting with the teachers and workers of Santiniketan, Gandhiji told them that Gurudevs were born only once in an age, they could not be made to order. No single individual could, therefore, take Gurudev's place; but they could all corporately represent his ideal, if each one put the institution first in all things and himself last.

"We feel like the crew of a vessel without the helmsman. We have no clear conception whither we are drifting, what we want to be," lamented a member of the staff.

"It is my conviction," replied Gandhiji, "that Gurudev as a person was greater than his works, greater even than this institution, where he taught and sang and into which he poured his whole soul. . . . That is perhaps true of all great and good men. . . . If, then, you are to represent that goodness or greatness for which Gurudev stands, but which he could not fully express through his works . . . you can do it only through *tapashcharya*. . . . The ideal before you is not to represent Bengal or even India. . . . Gurudev stood for humanity as a whole, but he could not do that unless he represented India with its destitute, dumb millions. That should be your aspiration as well. Unless you represent the mass mind of India you will not represent Gurudev as a man."

"Dismiss finances altogether from your mind," he said in answer to another question. "Finances dog your footsteps if you represent a real cause. Sincere men and women are never deterred by the handicap of finances, if their cause is as worthy as their means. Visva-Bharati will fail to attract the right type of talent and scholarship if it relies on the strength of material resources or the material attractions that it can offer. Its attraction must be moral or ethical. 'From each according to his capacity to each according to his need' is generally speaking a sound maxim, but it should not take you beyond current market values. You belong to Visva-Bharati, not because it finds you creature comforts

but because your moral worth increases day by day by working for its ideals. . . . I have been connected with many institutions for sixty years and I have come to the conclusion that every difficulty in their working was traceable to a defect in the understanding of moral values."

"How can we make headway against cynicism or lack of faith that we find among the youngsters?" another teacher asked.

"I heave a sigh of despair when you ask me that question," Gandhiji replied. "When you find that your pupils are without faith, you should say to yourself, 'I am without faith.' I have found that again and again in my own experience. And each time the discovery has been like an invigorating bath for me."

"The intellectual tradition of Gurudev is being fairly well maintained here, but I am afraid that the idealism for which he stood does not find full scope. What is the remedy?"

"All I can say is that the feeling, 'I am right but there is something wrong with the institution' betrays self-righteousness. It is killing. When you feel within yourself that you are all right but everything around you is wrong, the conclusion you should draw for yourself is that everything is all right but there is something wrong with you."

"Is there not too much of music and dancing here? Is there not danger of the music of the voice drowning the music of life?" finally asked Indira Devi, the Poet's niece. Gandhiji could not reply to that question then and there as it was time for him to leave, but it kept running in his mind. On returning to Calcutta in a letter he wrote:

> I have a suspicion that perhaps there is more of music than is warranted by life. . . . The music of life is in danger of being lost in the music of the voice. Why not the music of the walk, of the march, of every movement of ours and of every activity?. . . I think our boys and girls should know how to walk, how to march, how to sit, how to eat, in short how to perform every function of life. That is my idea of music. . . .
>
> I do not like preparing boys and girls for university examination. Visva-Bharati is its own university. . . . Concessions that Gurudev made to weakness with impunity, Visva-Bharati without him cannot make. . . . I am. . . anxious for Santiniketan to represent the highest that Gurudev stood for. . . .
>
> You will not have real rural reconstruction unless you begin with the basic craft, which is hand-spinning. . . . You know that I pleaded with Gurudev; at first in vain, later on he had begun to see what I was driving at. If you think that I have interpreted Gurudev aright in the matter of spinning, you will not hesitate to make Santiniketan hum with the music of the wheel.[33]

Gurudev and Gandhiji represented the two poles of India's psyche —the aesthetic and the ascetic. Neither excludes the other. It is significant that the great seer in the Upanishads invokes the First Cause as "the Ancient Poet", "the Arch-Disciplinarian". The one makes the stars to shine, the other keeps them from wandering from their courses.

The two were complimentary. The difference was in point of emphasis only. In a proper synthesis of the two lay the fulfilment of India's destiny. Gandhiji's last visit to Santiniketan symbolised and pointed to that union.

* * *

In the following week Gandhiji set out for Midnapore, and on his return from there, made a seven days' tour of Assam, going up the Brahmaputra as far as Sualkutchi. This was followed by a lightning tour of South India, where he had to preside over the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Dakshin Bharat Hindustani Prachar Sabha—an organisation for the propagation of Hindustani as the *lingua franca* of India, with which he had been closely associated for over a quarter of a century.

Midnapore had been ravaged by a cyclone and a tidal flood of unprecedented fury on top of governmental repression, which in frightfulness eclipsed anything that India had known during a quarter of a century of her non-violent freedom struggle. For months afterwards, the rice-fields were blackened by floating corpses of men and cattle, tanned and mummified to India-rubber toughness by the combined action of the brine and the fierce Bengal sun. The carcasses of about 700 heads of cattle and 300 human beings, out of many more which had perished in the cyclone, were said to be lying buried indiscriminately together under the ground where Gandhiji's prayer meeting was held at Contai. Dust had returned to dust and there was not a mark to tell the tale.

"God mercifully hides under a mantle of greenery the shame of man's tragedy on earth," observed Gandhiji in his post-prayer address. "Nevertheless, it betrays a lack of human feeling on the part of those who were responsible for it. The common practice is to give to each body a separate burial or cremation and the ground on which it takes place becomes consecrated ground."[34] But whilst he respected that sentiment, he went on, he did not make a fetish of it, and even derived satisfaction from the fact that a common calamity had united men and cattle in death, thereby symbolising the essential unity of all life: "The thought of it ought to humble man's pride and bring home to him the insignificance of human existence with its illusions, which hold him prisoner. If man learned to break through this net of illusions and made the fulfilment of his *dharma* the Pole Star of his life's pilgrimage, it would considerably lessen the burden under which the world is groaning."

5

While returning from Simla after the leaders' conference in July, 1945, Gandhiji had to avail himself of the facility of the special train which the authorities had provided and travel "like a thief" from Kalka to Wardha, as he put it. He had to submit to it pretty often thereafter. It was becoming more and more difficult to control the wild demonstrations

at the various stops on the way. Accidents, sometimes fatal, were avoided just by miracle. Besides, it meant dislocation of the entire traffic on the line. In one of his statements to the Press he set down the train of reflections which this experience had started in his mind: "This wildness is no prelude to Swaraj. It is no sign of non-violence. Crowds there should be to greet leaders. But they should be peaceful, dignified and completely disciplined. I have seen ordinary soldiers in thousands observing perfect silence whether on march or at rest. Our crowds, if they are non-violent soldiers of Swaraj, should be more disciplined than ordinary soldiers."[35]

Gandhiji turned his tours in Bengal, Assam and South India into tours of inspection and study of crowd behaviour and a means of educating the people. India was going to be independent soon. What exercised his mind was: How would the millions react to the first shock of freedom? As he watched the upwelling enthusiasm and devotion of the masses that greeted him wherever he went, he asked himself the question: "Did it spell violence or non-violence?" Unless they were properly organised and trained in non-violent behaviour, he was afraid, they would not be able to make much of freedom and it might even prove to be a questionable boon. For months he had been quietly preparing for the great event. He began delivering addresses on the topics of the day in the context of prayer to build up the right psychology for independence and instituted the mass singing of Ramadhun to the accompaniment of *tal*: "Congregational prayer is a means for establishing the essential unity through common worship. Mass singing of Ramadhun and the beating of *tal* . . . are as much a part of discipline in non-violence as physical drill and training in the use of the arms are that of military discipline."[36]

And again: "If 400 millions of India could speak with one voice, move together and act together as one man, freedom would be theirs for the asking. Prayer is the greatest binding force, making for the solidarity and oneness of the human family. If a person realises his unity with God through prayer, he will look upon everybody as himself. There will be no high, no low, no narrow provincialisms or petty rivalries. . . . If we are in tune with God, no matter how big a gathering, perfect quiet and order would prevail and even the weakest would enjoy perfect protection. Above all, realisation of God must mean freedom from all earthly fear. Political slavery . . . is incompatible with acceptance of the yoke of God; salvation is not for the slave."[37]

It was a revolutionary innovation in the technique of non-violence. He had not the time to develop it fully, or to test out its efficacy, but from what experience he had of it, he was convinced that it had boundless potentialities in the organisation of non-violent mass discipline and mass action. In a letter to Sardar Patel during his tour of Midnapore, he wrote: "The congregational prayer is having a magical effect. I am witnessing it every day. The crowds run into thousands—sometimes hundreds upon

thousands. Yet there is perfect order and pin-drop silence during the prayer—no jostling, no noise. It is a revelation."[38]

If the six and quarter crores of Bengalis could show the same discipline as they had shown that evening, he told a prayer gathering at Contai numbering over a lakh on the New Year's Day, not even a thousand Hitlers would be able to cow down their spirit or deprive them of their freedom.

During the train journey through Orissa—that "orphaned child of Mother India"—it had been arranged that Gandhiji's special should not stop at any of the halts during the night. But Gandhiji particularly asked the train to be stopped at some stations. At Cuttack, where the train reached at midnight, the crowd was particularly undisciplined. It hurt him. It was in Orissa that he had undertaken his first "pilgrimage" on foot years ago for the removal of untouchability and he expected big things of it. Did the good people of Orissa imagine, he asked them, that they could win freedom that way? Could undisciplined hooliganism be an answer to the atom bomb, which was the ultimate of brute force? It was time they purged themselves of the hidden lie in the soul, if they harboured any. "I do not want your cheers of welcome, nor your money. But you must clear up your minds and be honest with yourselves. That will please me more than your gifts."

The day journey began at Waltair. It made ample amends for the previous night's experience. It was a sight to see monster crowds waiting patiently and pouring out their coppers unstintingly into the Mahatma's outstretched hand. The counting occupied Kanu Gandhi and his batch of 40 tellers for the better part of two days and nights at Madras. The contribution included 3,895 currency notes and 54,608 coins; the total amount collected during the journey being 55,071 rupees 7 annas and 3 pies.

At Madura the gathering was not less than five or six hundred thousand strong. The volunteers were not used to managing such a big crowd. The pressure from behind the rostrum, where Gandhiji sat, continued to increase. Gandhiji announced that he was not going to address the meeting and pleaded with the people to go away. "They remained silent but would not leave. So I thought I would rest where I was for the night till the crowd had either dispersed or made a way for me."[39] On being advised, however, that a car was waiting for him and the crowd would make a passage, he yielded. The moment he got into the crowd, he realised his mistake: "It was not a safe passage through a noiseless, disciplined crowd for which I was pleading and waiting. Making noise and pressing forward towards their idol was the only way of expressing their love towards it. Here was a living idol made of the same clay as they. And this idol could not and would not appreciate their loud demonstration. I proved an impatient and inefficient teacher. Had I waited . . . this particular crowd would have learnt the value of silent and understanding love, perhaps of

the discipline needed for Swaraj. I shall know much better next time if such ever comes."[40]

In agreeable contrast to Madura was the experience at Palni. There is a famous South Indian temple at Palni on the top of a hill. The meeting was held under the shadow of the temple. Harijans had free access to the temple. Gandhiji, therefore, decided that he would pay a visit to it. But if the crowd insisted on accompanying him, while he was carried up the hill on a chair, it would be impossible to negotiate the flight of 600 steps which the pilgrimage involved. He would have been satisfied with doing *darshan* at the foot of the hill. "Let not people . . . think that I was guided by any belief in the potency of images of clay or precious metal. . . . Then, I was sure that the God of India was God living in the plains where the millions lived. . . . Many have gone and more would certainly go to Palni, but the crores could not. I would be, as I am, one of them. I was sure, too, that my prayer at the foot of the hill would be heard more than that of some devotees in the temple. . . . Nevertheless the millions who were assured that I would have *darshan* of the image itself would not understand this message . . . if I could not go up the hill. Their silence at the meeting encouraged the hope that I might be able to go through the advertised programme."[41] In the event, though there was a large crowd at the entrance, none insisted on joining while he and Rajaji were being taken up the hill on chairs and the advertised programme was successfully gone through. "I cannot help cherishing the fond hope," he afterwards commented, "that it augurs well for India under Swaraj, Home Rule or Independence, by whatever name one may choose to call the thing."[42]

* * *

The function itself which had taken Gandhiji to Madras occupied only a small part of his time. But its follow-up took some of his colleagues by surprise. He wrote letters to Srinivas Sastry, and Drs. Jayakar and Sapru, asking whether in future he might not correspond with them in the national language. Their cry of independence for the masses would be an insincere and hollow cry, he told all concerned, if they failed to cultivate the habit of speaking and thinking in the language of the people. It had to be now or never. Rajaji with his incorrigible love of paradox unwittingly made a *faux pas* when on receiving a scrawl in .Devanagari in the Master's own hand, he let the following escape from his pen: "Your Nagari is so illegible that I have only with great difficulty gathered what you wished to tell me. . . . It won't do to discard what we both know well and handle as medium and adopt deliberately a difficult medium except occasionally as a joke! I shall begin replying in Tamil if you write to me in illegible Nagari!"[43]

This brought the following from the Master: "If we discover a mistake, must we continue it? We began making love in English—a mistake. Must it express itself only by repeating the initial mistake? You

have the cake and eat it also. Love is love under a variety of garb—even when the lovers are dumb. Probably it is fullest when it is speechless. I had thought under its gentle, unfelt compulsion, you would easily glide into Hindustani and thus put the necessary finishing touch to your service of Hindustani. But let it be as you will, not I."[44]

Wrote back the repentant sinner: "Regarding Hindustani I plead guilty and ask for mitigation. Old age (not youth) being the excuse. But don't argue further. Your very sweetness makes me feel so guilty."[45]

* * *

While in Madras Gandhiji decided to resume publication of the *Harijan* weeklies which had been suppressed after the commencement of the "Quit India" struggle. The re-appearance was not without a dramatic touch. Gandhiji had hoped to post at Wardha the matter for the first issue to Ahmedabad, from where the weeklies were printed and published. It had been Gandhiji's pride that during half-a-century of active journalism, not one issue of his various journals had ever failed to come out on time—even when he was roaming over the length and breadth of India, Burma and Ceylon, and even during his visit to England. But the special bringing him back from Madras outdid even the regular Grand Trunk Express, which in speed and steadiness was once likened by the European member from Madras in the Central Assembly to a "drunken caterpillar in the last stage of inebriety", and reached its destination at midnight, seven hours late, when the mail bound for Ahmedabad had already left Wardha. Gandhiji regarded it as a bad beginning. "Let us get the first issue of the weeklies struck in Bombay," he suggested. "I once did like that in Phoenix in the case of the *Indian Opinion*."

"But what about despatch? The subscribers' registers are all at Ahmedabad."

"Let us wire the whole thing to Ahmedabad," someone suggested. But for that the whole of the Hindustani and Gujarati copy would have to be transcribed in Roman script as the system of accepting telegrams in Indian scripts had not yet been introduced. That took up the better part of the morning. Then, someone had a brain wave. "Send the English articles by wire and the rest by a special messenger. If they can be through with the English earlier, the press will be able to catch up with the vernacular copy."

And so, a special messenger was despatched and all the three weeklies came out on time after all the misadventures.

6

"I have just returned from a tour of South India and in my view a great many lives may depend on the attitude of the political parties to such administrative steps as we may take to economise in foodgrains and

make the necessary food available for the people in the drought-affected areas." So wrote Lord Wavell to Gandhiji in the second week of February, 1946. The winter crop in South India had failed and India was once more threatened with the prospect of an extensive famine. The official machinery was too wooden even for normal times. For an emergency like the one in prospect, it was completely outmoded. Public cooperation was necessary if the situation was to be tackled by the Government with any degree of success. Lord Wavell, therefore, approached Gandhiji for his advice and help in the impending crisis.

Gandhiji had had premonitions of the coming danger during his Bengal tour. What he had learnt about the conditions in Bihar and Madras since had disturbed him still more. Even before he had heard from the Viceroy, he had written an article for *Harijan* on food and cloth shortage and how to tackle the problem. He sent word to the Viceroy that he would be happy and willing to give to the Government all possible help. But as he had told Mr. Gelder of the *News Chronicle* as early as July, 1944, he was convinced, he reminded the Viceroy, that the food situation could not be properly tackled or the suffering of the people alleviated, unless the power and responsibility were transferred from British to Indian hands. Any attempt on the part of the Indian parties to help unofficially, could well lead to a conflict with the authorities. He, therefore, advised the Viceroy that the irresponsible executive at the Centre should immediately be replaced by a responsible one chosen from the elected members of the Central Assembly, if a calamity was to be averted.

The Viceroy did not accept this part of Gandhiji's advice but he appreciated his "good advice on the food situation". On his part, in addition to some other measures, the Viceroy ordered a drastic curtailment of cereal consumption in the Viceroy's House. Wrote George Abell, the Viceroy's secretary, in a letter: "The cuts in consumption of wheat and rice and their products here are so drastic that I feel hungry most of the day!"[46]

But that of course was no solution of the problem. The Viceroy, therefore, sent Mr. Abell to Gandhiji for a second time in the middle of March, with a proposal to constitute an Advisory Board consisting of Gandhiji, Jinnah and the Nawab of Bhopal, with the Viceroy himself as Chairman, to control and regulate the food situation which was threatening to overtake the country. Lord Wavell rightly felt, as he wrote to Gandhiji, that to "prevent suffering from famine by the people of India . . . the closest collaboration on the part of leaders is essential."[47] But there was a fly in the ointment.

"Don't you admit, there is a catch in it?" Gandhiji asked the Viceroy's Private Secretary after hearing all that he had to say about the Viceregal proposal.

"I admit that there is a catch," replied the Private Secretary, "but I hope you will be able to rise above it."

It was again the old ghost of "parity"—parity between Jinnah and Gandhi, parity at the food front, parity in the Provincial National Government, and finally parity between the League Muslims and the rest of India, otherwise spelt as Pakistan! At the time of the Simla Conference in June, 1945, the Viceroy had similarly invited Gandhiji and Jinnah to attend the conference as the "two acknowledged leaders of major political parties" although Gandhiji represented no party. The Muslim League was represented by its President, Jinnah. The only right person who could represent the Congress was the Congress President, Maulana Azad, or whomsoever he appointed as his representative, not Gandhiji. Gandhiji could not be a party to the Congress organisation—of which he was a humble servant—being by-passed. He, therefore, expressed his inability to accept the Viceroy's offer: "The situation created by the acceptance of the proposal," he told the Viceroy's Private Secretary, "would be unreal and, therefore, defeat the purpose in view."[48]

Gandhiji was prepared to consider the possibility of Maulana Azad, the Congress President, being invited with himself there to assist him, as he (Gandhiji) regarded himself an expert in such matters. But obviously that was not what the Viceroy wanted.

So, Gandhiji had to satisfy himself with doing whatever he could, unofficially and in his individual capacity, to help the country to combat the food crisis. As usual, he began with his immediate environment. He called together the members of the Sevagram Ashram and of the Talimi Sangh and asked them to realise the supreme necessity of conserving and economising food and increasing its supply by laying under cultivation every available inch of ground that could be used for growing food: "It would not . . . do for you to say in the present crisis that you are occupied with your educational activity whilst the people are threatened with death due to starvation. Nai Talim (Basic Education) must react to the present situation by converting itself into an instrument for increasing our food supply."[49] He began issuing useful hints in the *Harijan* weeklies as to how the people could effectively tackle the problem by their voluntary cooperative effort: "Panic must be avoided at all cost. We must refuse to die before death. . . . Flower gardens should be used for growing food crops. . . . All ceremonial functions should be stopped."[50] And as always, "Women can play the highest part in the alleviation of the present distress by economising in their households."[51] Finally, all this and more could be done without Government help: "In nine-tenths of our activity we can manage our daily affairs without the aid of the Government . . . if only it will refrain from interfering with the people."[52]

"Why may not people grow flowers? Colour and beauty are as necessary to the soul as food is to the body," asked Agatha Harrison, the English Quaker friend of Gandhiji, twitting him on his suggestion to dig up the lovely flower-beds in the terrace garden of R. D. Birla,

the elder brother of G. D. Birla, his host in Bombay, and grow there vegetables instead.

"We have been taught to believe that what is beautiful need not be useful and what is useful cannot be beautiful," replied Gandhiji. "I want to show that what is useful can also be beautiful. I would far rather that we learnt to appreciate the beauty of colour in vegetables."

And so the flower-beds in Birla House were dug up and gave place to plots of the beet, the marrow, and the cauliflower!

7

A despatch which the Viceroy had sent to Whitehall in December, 1945, while the elections in India were in progress, drew the attention of the British Cabinet to the changed situation in India and the growing unpopularity of the Government among all sections. Sooner or later they would have to reckon with the Congress. The Congress was, of course, equated with the "caste Hindu" but it was pointed out that if the Congress was suppressed, it would create a vacuum as there was no other organisation that could be put in its place. After the elections, the despatch went on to say, the Congress was sure to present its demand even in more extreme form if some action to solve the deadlock was not taken in the meantime, and it would become very difficult to resist it then. The Congress might even resort to direct action to enforce its demand and in that case the Government would find itself without any supporter—not even the Princes.

The delirious enthusiasm with which the Congress leaders were greeted on their release was a clear indication that the spirit of "Do or Die" had come to stay. Forgotten were the years of tribulation and frustration, the memories of the "Black-and-Tan" regime, the scars of war, famine and economic depression. The vision of free India was the only thing that mattered.

Even the army was affected. In Jubbalpore and some other places Indian soldiery mutinied. At Poona a similar development was averted as a result of Gandhiji's advice to the representatives of the Indian troops, who secretly came to seek his approval. The under-trial members of the Indian National Army, who had fought the British in Burma for India's independence were lionised by the public. The sudden flare-up in Calcutta in February, 1946, during which the police had to open fire on student-led processions fourteen times and which nearly paralysed the life of the city for three days, was another portent whose significance could not be missed.

Never was the gulf between the representatives of the British Power in India and the people of India wider, the distrust of the intentions of the former deeper or the impatience of the people to be free more intense. The only alternative, in the circumstances, to a complete and voluntary

withdrawal of the British Power was a virtual reconquest of India and its military occupation for an indefinite period. This the British public opinion in 1946 was not prepared to tolerate.

On the approach of Christmas, Sir Stafford Cripps, a leading member of the British Cabinet, wrote to Gandhiji, sending him his "most sincere and humble" wishes for "your personal welfare and all those causes that you have at heart", and added:

I most profoundly hope that in these coming months we shall be able by mutual understanding, respect and trust to work out between us a happier and brighter future for India. I know how you have laboured for this throughout your life and I pray that it may be given to you to see the climax of your hopes in the realisation of your desires. I shall, as always, try and play my part towards that happy solution of the great problems which confront our two countries.[53]

"I am hoping," Gandhiji wrote back, "that this time there is determination to do the right thing in terms of Indian thought." He recalled what King Edward had on one occasion said about right dealing. The question was of interpreting the treaty between the British and the Boers and the King had gently insisted on the Boer interpretation being accepted in preference to the British. "How I wish," concluded Gandhiji, "the admirable canon be repeated this time."[54]

But distrust of British intentions had become .chronic in India. To allay the distrust and to cultivate public opinion in advance, while the elections were in progress, a parliamentary delegation representative of all parties in Great Britain, was sent out to India. It toured all over the country in the months of January and February, 1946. Its members met representatives of all parties and overtook Gandhiji at Madras. As a result of their contacts they were able to carry the conviction that this time the British meant business.

* * *

During the period 1942-45, while the Congress was silenced behind the prison-walls, the Muslim League propaganda had free field, and with the help of British patronage, encouragement and active help, it was able to consolidate its power and hold upon a large section of the Muslim masses. As a result, in the elections, the Muslim League captured almost all the Muslim seats in the Central Assembly as well as all the Provincial Legislatures—except the North-West Frontier Province, where under the leadership of the Khan Brothers, the Congress captured not only the majority of the seats in the Assembly but the majority of the Muslim seats, too. Almost all other seats in the Centre as well as in the Provinces, including some Muslim seats, were captured by the Congress. As a result, the Congress formed Ministries in 8 out of 11 Provinces, and in the 9th—namely, the Punjab—it entered into a coalition with the Unionist Party which cut across communal alignments. The Muslim

League was able to form Ministries in Bengal and Sind. In Sind, however, its majority was precarious and it was kept in power only by the help of the Governor, Sir Francis Mudie.

The stage was thus set for the reconstitution of the Viceroy's Executive Council with the support of the main political parties and for convening a constitution making body, as announced by the Viceroy in September, 1945. Rightly sensing the prevailing mood in India, the British Government decided this time not to leave the work of negotiating a settlement of the Indian question in the hands of the Viceroy alone. On the 19th February, 1946, it was announced in the British Parliament that a mission consisting of three Cabinet Ministers would shortly proceed to India in order, in association with the Viceroy, to give effect to the programme outlined in the Viceregal announcement of September, 1945. The speech of Mr. Attlee, the Labour Prime Minister, in a debate in the House of Commons, on the 15th March, 1946, contained the following significant remarks:

> India must choose what will be her future constitution. I hope that the Indian people may elect to remain within the British Commonwealth.... But if she does so elect, it must be by her own free will.... If, on the other hand, she elects for independence, in our view she has a right to do so.... I am well aware, when I speak of India, that I speak of a country containing a congeries of races, religions and languages.... We are very mindful of the rights of minorities, and minorities should be able to live free from fear. On the other hand, we cannot allow a minority to place a veto on the advance of the majority. ... There is the problem of the Indian States.... I do not believe for a moment that the Indian Princes would desire to be a bar to the forward march of India. But, as in the case of any other problems, this is a matter that Indians will settle themselves.

Thus, for the first time, the three principal hurdles that had all along stood in the way of the settlement of the Indian question viz., the veto of the minority on political advance, the time-honoured obligations to the Princes, and the denial of India's right to unqualified independence, were removed, so far as the declaration of British policy was concerned. But other hurdles, not less formidable—"arising out of past circumstances"—remained, which rendered largely nugatory the promise held out by that declaration and converted the glorious dawn of freedom into a red and baleful morn.

Ever alert like a sentinel on his watch-tower, Gandhiji had been carefully watching the signs of the time. It was the hour of India's destiny. Would India of his dreams in her hour of fulfilment, acquit herself in a manner worthy of her glorious past? "The British Cabinet Delegation will soon be in our midst," he declared at one of his prayer meetings. "To suspect their *bona fides* in advance would be a variety of weakness. As a brave people, it is our duty to take at its face value the declaration

of the British Ministers, that they are coming to restore to India what is her due. If a debtor came to your house in contrition to repay his debt, would it not be your duty to welcome him? Would it not be unmanly to treat him with insult and humiliation in remembrance of an injustice?"[55]

"The tide of bitterness is rising high; it is not good for the soul," he remarked to Mr. Brailsford, the British journalist. Quoting a remark of Lord Lytton about British pledges, Gandhiji expressed the hope that what was being promised to the ear would not be broken to the hope. It had happened often enough before. "When you are about to transfer power you must act boldly."

"Would independent India be willing to enter into a defensive alliance with Britain or enter into relations helpful to both, living as they did in a perilous world?" Mr. Brailsford asked.

"Supposing India said 'No'," replied Gandhiji. "Would you make the recognition of India's independence contingent upon her entering into alliance with Britain? . . . No calculation entered into the English mind when they settled with the Boers at the end of a bloody war. . . . And the Boers have stayed friends ever since. If you leave India as a willing friend she will always remain friendly."

Britain had made up her mind to end the coercive connection with India, Mr. Brailsford assured Gandhiji. But if the question were asked in no bargaining spirit whether Britain could look forward to having mutually helpful relations with independent India, what would India's reply be?

"If India feels the glow of independence," Gandhiji answered, "she would probably offer such a treaty of her own free will." But the correct thing for Britain would be to say, he added, that even "if India gives us no quarter after she is independent, we shall be satisfied to lie in the bed we have made."

An English friend who had come with the Friends Ambulance Unit to render humanitarian service, put before Gandhiji his dilemma. However much they tried to befriend the people, he said, their past clung to them and drove them nearly to desperation. "The atmosphere is so poisoned that I have wondered if it would not be better for Englishmen not to attempt to come to India to serve the people for the time being but to wait for better times."

They must accept the fact, answered Gandhiji, that the distrust of Englishmen was there. It had its root in history. The Indians had so far known Englishmen only as members of the ruling race—supercilious when they were not patronising. The man in the street made no distinction between the Empire-building Englishmen of the old type whom he had known and the new type that was now coming fired with the spirit to make reparation for what his forefathers had done. The only course for the latter was to try to live down the prejudice against him.

"If you are cast in the heroic mould there will be no difficulty. You will in the end be taken at your word, if you persevere. . . . (But) if one has not the fire of sacrifice in him, I would say: 'Do not come to India just yet'."[56]

8

In the third week of February, 1946, there was a mutiny of the Royal Indian Navy ratings which affected 74 ships, 4 flotillas and 20 shore establishments, including 4 major bases. The ratings captured 23 ships of all description. The cause of the mutiny was said to be the alleged insulting treatment by British naval officers. Their grievance was probably genuine but in resorting to mutiny the ratings were badly advised. It was only the wise, level-headed and courageous firmness of Sardar Patel, who negotiated an unconditional surrender by promising that the Congress would see to it that there was no victimisation and the legitimate demands of the ratings were accepted as soon as possible, that saved the situation.

The incident was indicative of the temper of the times. The British Commander-in-Chief of the navy had even threatened that the Government would not hesitate to use "the overwhelming force" at its disposal "even if it meant the destruction of the navy"—a threat which had later to be explained away before the storm of indignant protest which it raised in India.

The mutiny was accompanied by large scale disturbances in the cities of Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Delhi and Karachi. Popular rowdyism was met by savage reprisals by the authorities resulting in much avoidable carnage. As usual the worst sufferers were innocent people.

Gandhiji read in these events and the related happenings a portent of what was coming. The Indian Socialists and underground workers, in their juvenile enthusiasm, had gone all out in their admiration of the "fine spirit" of the mutineers. Grit became foolhardiness, Gandhiji sternly warned, when it was untimely and suicidal. "If it was for (the redress of) grievances . . . they (the ratings) should have waited for the guidance and intervention of political leaders of their choice. If they mutinied for the freedom of India, they were doubly wrong. They could not do so without a call from a prepared revolutionary party."[57]

Rowdyism by combined forces of Hindus and Muslims against Europeans was witnessed on the occasion of Victory Day celebrations in the Capital in the first week of March. Both Hindus and Muslims were receiving training in deliberate, calculated rowdyism and brutality, observed Gandhiji. "A combination between Hindus and Muslims and others for the purpose of violent action is unholy and will lead to and

probably is a preparation for mutual violence—bad for India and the world."[58]

The cry had gone forth during the disturbances to "unite Hindus and Muslims at the barricades". The barricade phase of Indian freedom struggle had, at least for the time being, ended, observed Gandhiji. "Fighters do not always live at the barricade.... The barricade life must always be followed by the constitutional. That front is not taboo for ever."[59]

The masses were not interested in the ethics of non-violence, rejoined the Socialist friends. But surely, answered Gandhiji, the people were very much interested in knowing the way which would bring them freedom. "Millions cannot go underground. Millions need not. A select few may fancy that they will bring Swaraj to the millions by secretly directing their activity. Will this not be spoon-feeding? Only open challenge and open activity is for all to follow. Real Swaraj *must* be felt by all—man, woman, and child. To labour for that consummation is true revolution. India has become a pattern for all exploited races of the earth, because India's has been an open, unarmed effort which demands sacrifice from all without inflicting injury on the usurper."[60]

The country had to prepare itself for that. The barricade had to be put aside. The Cabinet Mission was coming. It was possible that the Mission would put forth an insoluble conundrum. "So much the worse for them. If they are intent upon finding an honest way out of the difficulty of their own creation, I have no doubt there is a way."[61] But the nation had to play its part. "If the union (of Hindus and Muslims) at the barricade is honest then there must be union also at the constitutional front."[62] That was the challenge that the fighters for freedom had now to face.

"There is little doubt," he mused in *Harijan*, "that India is about to reach her cherished goal of... independence. Let the entrance be prayerful."[63] And to suit the action to the word he decided that thereafter he would put up not in the palatial residences of his rich friends but in Harijan quarters. "Your day dawns from the moment you wake up," he wrote to A. V. Thakkar, endearingly called Thakkar Bapa, the veteran Harijan servant. "Having awoken I cannot now rest."[64] "India's slavery under the British rule is hardly two centuries old," he wrote in another letter. "Yet we are impatient to see it ended here and now. How dare we, now that India is on the threshold of the Promised Land, ask Harijans to subsist on the promise of a distant utopia? The emancipation of the Harijans cannot wait. It must be now or never."[65]

* * *

In Uruli Kanchan there was a military camp. Hardly a day passed when a group of Indian soldiers did not contact Gandhiji. They joined him in his morning walks, they were present at his evening prayers, they met him at his residence. Two batches of them came on the last but one

day of his stay there. They said: "We are soldiers but we are soldiers of Indian freedom."

"I am glad to hear that," replied Gandhiji. "So far you have mostly been instrumental in the suppression of Indian freedom. Have you heard of Jallianwala Bagh?"[66] It was the Gurkhas under General Dyer who had opened fire on the unsuspecting, unarmed Indian crowd there.

"Oh, yes. But those days are gone. We were in those days like the proverbial frog in the well. We have now seen the world, our eyes are opened."

"We admit we are mercenaries, as you once put it," interpolated another. "But our hearts are no longer so."

"I am glad to hear that," said Gandhiji. "But let me tell you that my use of that expression was not intended to cast any reflection upon you. It was only descriptive of a soldiery that serves a foreign Government for a living."

"What would be our position when India is independent?" asked still another.

"You will fully share that independence and breathe the air of freedom with your countrymen. . . . You have had military training. . . . You have learnt the lesson of comradeship under common danger. You will give India the benefit of that training. Independent India will need you. . . . But in free India you won't be pampered as you are today. You won't have these lavish privileges with which a foreign Government bribes you at the expense of India's poor. India is destitute. . . . Unless you are prepared to forgo your privileges you will feel sorry when independence comes and sigh for the return of old times and old masters."

"There was a time," remarked one of them, "when we were not allowed to read any civil newspaper. And now we go and tell our officers that we are going to see our greatest leader, and no-one dares to stop us."

"I know," replied Gandhiji, "there is a new ferment and a new awakening among all the army ranks today. Not a little of the credit for this change is due to Netaji Bose. I disapprove of his method but he has rendered a signal service to India by giving the Indian soldiers a new vision and a new ideal."

"How anybody can think of dividing India into two, three or more parts we army-men are at a loss to understand. We know only one India for which we have fought and shed our blood," remarked a senior ranker among them.

"Well, it requires all sorts to make the world," replied Gandhiji. And they all laughed.

"May we shout slogans?"

"Well, you may," replied Gandhiji, and they all but brought down the rafters of Gandhiji's little room by their repeated shouts of *Jai*

Hind, *Netaji-ki Jai* and so on with the naivete and exuberance of little children.

The next day a special train carried about eight hundred of them to another camp. There was a thunderous roar of *Jais* and endless waving of farewells to Gandhiji as their train passed in front of his residence. From the patriotic exuberance of their slogans it might as well have been a Congress special carrying delegates to an extraordinary session of the Congress!

The same day Gandhiji left for Delhi to meet the Cabinet Delegation.

Part Two
THE GATHERING STORM

CHAPTER VII

'RING OUT THE OLD RING IN THE NEW'

1

WITHIN EARSHOT of Birla Temple, that exuberant canticle in red sandstone and marble, with its far-flung terraced walks, water-strips, grottos and sylvan retreats, on the Reading Road in New Delhi, but away from the pomp and circumstance of the capital city, is Valmiki Temple. It is a temple dedicated to the sage Valmiki, robber-turned-saint, author of the Ramayan, and the patron-saint of the Valmiki sweepers of northern India. On the south and west of it lies a stretch of undulating scrub land, with the picturesque Ridge in the background, straggling down to the Jumna and beyond.

It was here that Gandhiji lived at the time of the Cabinet Mission's negotiations in April, 1946. Only a low wall separated it from the New Delhi municipal sweepers' slums, where dwelt the disinherited ones. The approach was by a narrow, crooked lane. By day, the shimmering vista of its dust, squalor, dinginess and flies under the blaze of the Indian summer sun made one's eyes ache. But with the dusk the whole scene underwent a magic change, and the scintillating mica-bearing red *bajri*, with which it was freshly strewn, turned it into the likeness of a diamond-studded footway in fairy land.

Here met day after day, and week after week, members of the Congress Working Committee—Nehru and Patel, Maulana Azad and Sarojini Naidu, the poetess, who later became the first woman Governor of a major Indian Province. Here came the British Cabinet Ministers, statesmen and diplomats of various nations; Press-hounds, globe-trotters and multi-millionaires from all quarters of the globe; top-ranking Congress leaders and sun-dried bureaucrats—the pride of the Indian "steel frame"—to hold conference with the saint of Sevagram behind his spinning-wheel, spinning out the thread of India's destiny.

Thus, in the summer of 1946, almost overnight, the obscure little Bhangi (sweepers') Colony became the rival of the Viceroy's House in New Delhi as the venue of the intense drama of the British Cabinet Mission's negotiations with Indian leaders which resulted in the ending of one hundred and fifty years of British rule and the birth of the free Indian nation.

Alongside of this there was another manifestation, the dark implications of which were hidden from the people's ken at that time. In the

heart of the Bhangi Colony and on the very ground where Gandhiji used to hold his evening prayer meetings, a group of Hindu youths used daily to hold physical-culture drill, parades and exercises in *lathi* play etc., ending up with a ritual salutation to the saffron flag of "Mother India"—not Gandhiji's "Mother India" that claimed all those who were born on the soil as equally her children regardless of their caste, creed or colour but "Mother—the Terrible" that called for the chastisement of the "wicked *vidharmis*" i.e., Muslims, for the wrong done to her. It was the Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh—the militant communalist Hindu organisation, opposite number of the Muslim National Guards, the logic of whose fanatical creed ultimately claimed as its victim the Father of the Nation.

2

Of the three members of the Cabinet Mission, Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Sir Stafford Cripps had known Gandhiji before. Mrs. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence had met him at a meeting held in support of the campaign for votes for women during one of his earlier visits to England. He had at that meeting ventured to criticise some of the militant suffragette tactics in vogue at that time as being incompatible with non-violence. His remarks immediately brought the redoubtable one of the Pankhurst sisters to her feet. Mrs. Pethick-Lawrence had on that occasion stood by Gandhiji. He had treasured that memory ever since.

It was a characteristic of Gandhiji that his bonds of relationship with many a leader in public life—friends, co-workers and even opponents—were more often rooted in his appreciation of certain traits in their personal and private lives—which he regarded as crucial—than in an affinity for their political views. Sometimes it was their mutual devotion in conjugal life, sometimes absence or sublimation of conjugal life as a result of their mutual devotion, at still other times it was some heroic trait displayed in the face of a painful dilemma or conflict such as crops up in the married or unmarried lives of individuals, which provided him with the criterion by which he tested their real worth. That was how, for instance, Sir Malcolm Hailey, who, Gandhiji was told, had spurned the prospect of the Viceroyalty of India for the sake of his wife; Lord Ampthill, who never married so as to be able to give his undivided loyalty to the service of his country; and Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah by virtue of the rare devotion and self-dedication of his great sister, which he (Jinnah) commanded and reciprocated, won his deep regard which no amount of difference or clashes in the political field could obliterate or diminish.

It was the same in the case of Lord and Lady Pethick-Lawrence. Gandhiji held very strong views on equality of status between husband and wife in married life, so much so that in his Ashram he had got even the ancient Hindu marriage ritual modified to bring it in line with his ideal. The fact that Lord Pethick-Lawrence insisted on taking Emmaline's

name in return for his brought him nearer to Gandhiji than anything else could have. Lady Pethick-Lawrence became the link between the two.

Sir Stafford with his austere simplicity, vegetarianism and faith in the healing power of the spirit came nearest to Gandhiji in his mental make up. If Lord Pethick-Lawrence with his sturdy British common-sense represented the conscience of the Cabinet Delegation, Sir Stafford represented the brains. With his extraordinary mental energy, resourcefulness and legal acumen, he helped to provide his colleagues on more than one occasion with the key to the understanding of Gandhiji's mind. Gandhiji on his part was delighted to find in Sir Stafford "a fellow crank and faddist", and when, in the course of the Cabinet Mission's negotiations, Sir Stafford fell ill, Gandhiji sent to him his "most charming (nature-cure) doctor"—Dr. Dinshah Mehta—who "completely captured my heart"![1] On Gandhiji's part what captured his heart completely was his discovery that in Sir Stafford he had met a man who, as subsequent events showed, had the courage to live up to his conviction. His judgment was borne out when later in his final illness, as a nature-curist, Sir Stafford fell back on his faith in the healing power of the spirit, which though it did not cure him, like Gandhiji's Ramanama gave him the spiritual solace, strength and firmness to fight undismayed the fell disease with undisturbed peace and presence of mind.

Both Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Sir Stafford shared with Gandhiji his deep religious background. In his very first letter from Delhi Sir Stafford had invited Gandhiji to attend with the members of the Cabinet Mission the Friends' silent prayer service which two English Quaker friends, Agatha Harrison and Horace Alexander, close associates of the late C. F. Andrews, had arranged as a part of their Christian peace-making mission. "I have promised Agatha Harrison," wrote Sir Stafford, "to attend her special time of quiet thought and prayer on Sunday next and I had hoped very much indeed that you might be there . . . so that we might together join in a short time of spiritual harmony. I do hope very much that it will be possible for you to be present there and that would also give me an opportunity of calling upon you for an informal talk before we meet you in a more official atmosphere."[2] Gandhiji gladly accepted the invitation. Sir Stafford on his part attended Gandhiji's public prayer meeting when he saw Gandhiji on his arrival in Bhangi Colony. How deeply they shared together the things of the spirit is shown by a letter which Sir Stafford wrote to Gandhiji on his return to England about the illness of their daughter whom they had put in a special Quaker home. The letter referred to the "wonderful spiritual atmosphere" about the place "which will have, we hope, its healing effect with the other treatment she will be able to have."[3]

These silent prayer meetings provided to the members of the Cabinet Mission and Gandhiji an invaluable occasion for spiritual communion.

During subsequent weeks, Gandhiji would sometimes send Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Sir Stafford an advance copy of some article of his in *Harijan*, or the English rendering of a hymn sung at his prayer service which had gripped him. At another time Lord Pethick-Lawrence would send back in exchange a popular English story illustrating the average Englishman's faith in the benevolence of an overall Providence. The close bond of understanding which thus sprang up from these spiritual contacts enabled them to ride out many a jolt inseparable from the rough and tumble of politics and contributed not a little towards the final settlement.

Quakers believe that in corporate silent waiting God "does speak to us" and we can understand His will "in the common walks of life". "The thinking busy soul," wrote an early Quaker, "excludes the voice of God. Emptying of the mind of conscious processes of thought and filling it with the spirit of God unmanifest brings one an ineffable peace and attunes the soul with the infinite." This silence of a religious and spiritual worship, said George Fox, is not a "drowsy unthinking state of mind" but "a withdrawing of it from all visible objects and vain imaginings." Gandhiji's own experience based upon his observance of a weekly day of silence tallied with this. "If we want to listen to the still small voice that is always speaking within us, it will not be heard if we continually speak."[4] In the attitude of silence "the soul finds the path in a clearer light and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness."[5] The cultivation and practice of this fruitful silence is not a mechanical performance. It is an elaborate art. "Silence of the sewn up lips is no silence. One may achieve the same result by chopping off one's tongue, but that would not be silence. He is silent who having the capacity to speak utters no idle word."[6] In the first meeting of the Friends which Gandhiji attended with the members of the Cabinet Mission, he expressed the hope that the "silent communion would help them to experience an undisturbed peace in the midst of turmoil to curb anger and cultivate patience."[7]

The silent communion of the Friends is broken when one or another in the gathering feels a call to "share his concern" with the rest. On this particular occasion one of the Indian friends in the company broke the silence by recalling the memory of Charlie Andrews who was the "silken bond of the spirit between the good that is England and the good that is India." The biographer of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman has recorded how it was the outspoken and courageous championship of the Boers during the darkest days of the Boer war by an English woman, Emily Hobhouse, that contributed not a little to the liquidation of the hatreds engendered by the incidents of the war and to the final establishment of an understanding between the two nations. Charlie Andrews was to India what Emily Hobhouse was to the Boers in South Africa. "How can India hate Englishmen as such when there is the

example of Charlie Andrews before us?" Gandhiji used to say. Gandhiji wound up his remarks in that meeting by expressing the hope that Charlie Andrews' labours in the cause of Indian independence would prove sufficient ransom "for what British imperialism might have done to India".[8]

3

The Cabinet Delegation's negotiations were held against the lurid background of communal trouble. The Muslim League had read in Mr. Attlee's statement in Parliament of 15th March, 1946, a threat to take away from it the power of veto with which Lord Linlithgow had invested it by his offer of August, 1940, that the British Government would not transfer their responsibility to any system of Government whose authority was directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life, and Jinnah had denounced any attempt to "bypass the League" by the Cabinet Delegation as a "flagrant breach of faith". This had been followed by a series of stabbing incidents of a communal character in many places by unknown hooligans in circumstance which *prima facie* left no doubt as to the political motive behind them.

Delhi, redolent of the memories of Hindu-Muslim unity in the hey-day of the great Khilafat and non-cooperation movements, had fallen on evil days. Still to Gandhiji it was the city of that Christian man, Principal S. K. Rudra, the honoured colleague of Charlie Andrews and Gandhiji's earliest host in Delhi, and of Swami Shraddhanandji, the great reformer and educationist, who met his martyrdom twenty-one years before Gandhiji in the same city. It was the city of Hakim Ajmal Khan and Dr. Ansari, the finest specimens of Islamic culture, and living monuments of Islamic liberalism and Hindu-Muslim unity at its best, who commanded the affection and regard of all communities alike; and of the Ali Brothers, who, till they parted company with Gandhiji and the Congress in later years, were as blood-brothers to him—the personal bond surviving even when the political had snapped. It was here that the blood of Hindu and Muslim martyrs in India's non-violent struggle for freedom was first mingled in 1919.

The Jamia Millia or the Muslim National University, the seedling which Hakim Ajmal Khan, Dr. Ansari and the Ali Brothers in collaboration with Gandhiji had planted at the commencement of the non-cooperation movement in 1920, was shortly to commemorate its Silver Jubilee. Gandhiji paid the institution a surprise visit in the midst of his crowded time, and had a quiet, family gathering with the students and members of the staff. One of the students asked what they could do to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity. The way was, Gandhiji replied, that even if all the Hindus turned rowdies and abused them, they should not cease to regard them as their blood-brothers and *vice versa*. "If one return

decency for decency, it is a bargain. Even thieves and dacoits do that. . . . Humanity disdains the calculation of profit and loss. . . . If all the Hindus listened to my advice, or in the alternative the Muslims listened to me, there would be peace in India which nothing would be able to shatter. The mischief-maker will weary of the sorry business of stabbing, when there is no retaliation or counter provocation. An Unseen Power will arrest his uplifted arm and it will refuse to obey his wicked will. . . . God is good and does not allow wickedness to proceed beyond a certain length."

In a corner of the Jamia grounds stood Dr. Ansari's tomb. Before returning home Gandhiji made a pilgrimage to it. The doctor had been like a brother to Gandhiji. During his twenty-one days' self-purification fast at Poona in 1933 when Gandhiji's condition suddenly became critical, Gandhiji sent him a message at Delhi that he would love nothing better than to die in his lap. Back came the good doctor's reply; he would not let him die either in his or anyone else's lap! And interrupting his visit to Europe, he hastened to the bedside of his friend to see him safely through the fast. A platform thrown up into a series of terraces marked the burial place. A plain marble tablet at the foot bore the doctor's name and the dates of his birth and death. The austere simplicity of the monument added to the poignancy of the visit. The visit symbolised Gandhiji's undying faith in the ultimate inevitability of Hindu-Muslim unity.

4

The Red Fort trials were in full swing. The fate of the Indian National Army (I.N.A.) prisoners hung in the balance. The whole country was stirred to its depths. Advocate Bhulabhai Desai had won fresh laurels by his brilliant advocacy of the I.N.A. men's cause.

It was the lynx-eyed vigilance of Sardar Patel that had brought the arrival of the Indian National Army prisoners in India under the blanket of military secrecy to Gandhiji's notice. Some of the prisoners had already been court-martialled and shot. As soon as Gandhiji came to know of it he wrote to Lord Wavell:

> This I write in fear and trembling, lest I may be overstepping my limit. I am watching the progress of the trial of the members of the corps raised by or under Shri Subhas Babu. Though I can have nothing in common with any defence by force of arms, I am never blind to the valour and patriotism often displayed by persons in arms. . . . India adores these men who are on the trial. No doubt the Government have overwhelming might on their side. But it will be a misuse of that power if it is used in the teeth of universal Indian opposition. It is not for me to say what should be done except that what is being done is not the way. . . .[9]

Gandhiji saw General Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief of India, too, about it and was happy to get a reassuring reply from him. But while Gandhiji identified himself with the I.N.A. undertrial prisoners' cause as he was anxious to save their lives and he wanted the authorities to realise that the whole of India was behind them, he was convinced that India's freedom could not come the I.N.A. way and it was on his insistence backed by Pandit Nehru—whom the I.N.A. interlude had finally convinced of the futility of trying to win India's freedom by an armed fight or through the aid of a foreign power—that the Congress Working Committee had recorded its opinion that "whilst it is right and proper for the Congress to defend the members of the I.N.A. now undergoing trial and to aid its sufferers, Congressmen must not forget that this support and sympathy do not mean that the Congress has in any way deviated from its policy of attaining Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means."[10]

Gandhiji paid the prisoners two visits in the company of Sardar Patel—once in the Kabul Lines and again in the Red Fort. He was delighted when they told him that they had completely liquidated communalism in their midst under Netaji Bose's inspiring leadership while they were in actual fighting. There were no separate messes for the Hindus and the Muslims in the I.N.A. over there. But on their return to India as prisoners of war, they complained, the curse of "Hindu tea" and "Muslim tea" was again being forced upon them by the camp authorities.

Gandhiji told them they should not suffer it. "You should mix the two together half and half and then share!"

"That is exactly what we are doing," they replied.

Even the British officer in charge of the camp was deeply moved when at parting they lined up in radial rows behind their barbed-wire fences and sang full-throatedly, without a trace of fear or anxiety as to their fate, the I.N.A. Hindustani adaptation of the Poet Tagore's celebrated *Jana-gana-mana* song, to the tune of which they had marched to face death for the sake of India's freedom on the battle-field. It was so spontaneous and disciplined. "They are nice chaps," the officer in charge exclaimed. "I hope it will be well with them."

From the barracks Gandhiji proceeded to see General Mohan Singh—the founder of the I.N.A.—who preferred to live separately from the rest on account of the inner fissures in the I.N.A. ranks, and from there to the field-hospital, where there were Major-General Chatterjee, Major-General Loganathan and Colonel Habib-ur-Rahman.

"What shall we do, if no settlement is arrived at this time?" asked one of the I.N.A. men. "So far as we are concerned, we shall always be prepared to die to the last man."

"Ours is to die without killing," replied Gandhiji.

The military officer who accompanied Gandhiji was closely listening to the dialogue. He interpolated: "Enough of killing and being killed; we want neither."

"You say this!" exclaimed Gandhiji agreeably surprised to hear such sentiments from the lips of a professional soldier.

To the I.N.A. friends he remarked: "I have no hesitation in saying that mine is by far the superior way."

Gandhiji had hitherto discounted all reports about Netaji Bose's death. The visit resulted in his revising his opinion. Colonel Habib-ur-Rahman was with Netaji on the plane when the fateful crash occurred. He described in vivid detail the circumstances of the tragedy. "Netaji had received extensive burns on the hands and other parts of the body. But unmindful of them he asked me how I was. I told him I felt all right, and hoped to pull through. He said he did not expect to survive and gave his last message: 'I am going, but tell my countrymen and all concerned, the fight for Indian independence must continue till the goal is attained.' The crash occurred at 9.30 a.m. At half-past-three in the afternoon he breathed his last, retaining consciousness almost till the end. Not a groan escaped his lips in spite of the agony." The narrator was visibly moved. Gandhiji announced at his prayer meeting next day that he was convinced that, contrary to his previous belief, Netaji was no more.

Remarked another I.N.A. man in the company: "We feel neither depressed nor disappointed. Now that the country as a whole has taken up the struggle, we feel our work is finished. It gladdens our heart to find that what we strove for is on the brink of being realised bloodlessly. What could be better than that!"

As Major-General Shah Nawaz had told Gandhiji, this was also the spirit of Netaji Bose's parting advice to them before the final surrender to the British.

Still another I.N.A. man asked Gandhiji how they could serve the nation. Gandhiji replied: "By throwing yourself heart and soul into constructive work. More lives are being threatened today by the impending famine than were lost in fighting the enemy on the battle-field."

Netaji Bose was as a son to Gandhiji. Gandhiji had the highest admiration for his ability, sincerity and sacrifice, patriotism and resourcefulness. But he had never made a secret of the fact that he could not subscribe to Netaji's method. And so he never encouraged the "Bose legend". "We have wasted precious twenty-five years," he said to another group of I.N.A. men, "if we have not yet stripped the profession of killing and destroying of the thick coat of varnish that has covered it for so long."[11] He gave the I.N.A. his unstinted admiration for their valour and their readiness to die for the sake of India's freedom, but in that, he said, he was ready to contest the palm with them with his ideal of *sthitaprajna* which required him to hold court with death with equal

courage, though unarmed. He told the I.N.A. men that courage and patriotism of a higher order were needed in taking up bucket and broom and identifying oneself with the lowest of the low by becoming a scavenger than was called forth by armed fighting. All could not emulate the I.N.A. men's physical bravery. But the ideal of *sthitaprajna* was meant for all—not for the select few, the saint and the seer only. "As a humble fellow-toiler, let me bear witness that anyone—even a simple-minded villager—who wants to and tries can attain the state of mental equipoise described in the Gita. We all lose our sanity at times though we may not care to admit it. But the ideal of the *sthitaprajna* requires one never to lose patience even with a child or indulge in anger or abuse. Religion as I understand it is a thing to be practised in this life. It is not a means for attaining merit in the next, irrespective of what you may have done here."

The message which the I.N.A. men had for India at that juncture, therefore, was "not the adoption of the method of appeal to arms for settling disputes, but of cultivating non-violence, unity, cohesion and organisation." Their greatest achievement in Gandhiji's eyes had been to gather together, under one banner, men from diverse religions and races of India and to imbue them with the spirit of solidarity and oneness to the exclusion of all communal or parochial sentiment. What they had done under the glamour and romance of fighting had now to be practised and inculcated upon others in different conditions which were harder by far. More, they would have to learn to die without killing; in other words to cultivate the attributes of *sthitaprajna* as set forth in the Gita.

The I.N.A. group told him that they, too, had realised that they would thereafter have to strive to serve India as soldiers of non-violence. This some of them did with credit during the difficult days in Noakhali and Bihar.

Gandhiji's visit to the I.N.A. prisoners and his talks with them dramatised the soul of India facing the cross-roads at the dawn of freedom. It was an India resurgent and reborn, vibrant with new hope and expectancy of realising the long looked for millennium. People had discovered the efficacy of the technique of dying without killing in their struggle against the British. It was Gandhiji's effort now to make them see that unless they took that lesson with them in dealing with one another in what lay ahead of them, their struggle for freedom in its final phase would turn into a fratricidal civil war which would reduce to ashes the prize they were fighting for.

5

An English novelist in one of his immortal stories has depicted a doctor, who when suddenly brought into broad day-light after his long

confinement in a dark dungeon, blinks uncomfortably and wants to go back into the unlighted gloom of his cell. Would India have the courage to face up to the reality when overtaken by independence after nearly two centuries of subjection, or would her courage fail her and she would want to go back to the ease and security of her servitude? Would the people be ready to pay the price of freedom and make the necessary sacrifices that freedom demands and commands or would they want to cling to the privileges and perquisites to which the alien rulers had accustomed them? Gandhiji saw that some of these would have to be willingly sacrificed before they could enter the temple of freedom.

Very characteristic was his reply to a representative of the landholders who waited upon him in the Bhangi Colony:

"Where shall we stand when India is independent?"

"You will be as free, say, as any scavenger."

But that was not his interviewer's point. He wanted to know whether as a class they would be able to retain their privileges.

As a non-violent man, Gandhiji replied, he could not countenance the usurpation of anybody's just rights. But some of the extraordinary privileges under British rule were themselves of the nature of a usurpation. They could not be maintained.

"Many zamindars existed long before the advent of the British. Don't you think they have a right to exist?" the friend persisted.

"Anything that is consistent with moral values," replied Gandhiji, "has a right to be retained. *Per contra* wrong has no prescriptive right to exist merely because it is of long standing."

"We want even-handed justice. We have no objection to an independent India abolishing all manner of vested interests. Only let there be no discrimination against us specially," finally pleaded the friend.

"A just man," replied Gandhiji, "need have no fear of any kind from an independent India."

Another group asked whether there was any assurance that under independence the "right of proselytisation" would be guaranteed by a statute. It provoked from Gandhiji the counter question whether the questioners really believed in the ideal of independence or whether their support to that ideal hung upon a consideration. In the latter case, he would say that they believed neither in independence nor in religion. Who could suppress the voice of truth if it filled their being? Conversely, of what avail was a statutory guarantee if there was not that fire within to bear witness to truth?

That was of course incontestable, interpolated one of the group. No-one could suppress the truth but could the Mahatma guarantee that no attempt would be made to suppress it?

The Mahatma could give no such guarantee. Had his questioner forgotten the story of Daniel, who dared to break the decree of King

Darius, prohibiting in his kingdom "the worship of any god or man save himself?" Did Daniel ask for or need any "guarantee" that he would come out of the ordeal unscathed when he was ordered to be thrown into the hungry lion's den? The story goes that the king was so impressed by Daniel's faith that he rescinded his former decree which was "unalterable under the law of the Medes and Persians" and issued another in its place to the effect that "in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel for he is the living God and steadfast as ever. . . ." And so Daniel "prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus"![12]

As parting advice, Gandhiji repeated to them the advice of Lord Salisbury to a missionary deputation that waited upon him, when he was in office, in connection with their proselytisation activity in China. They were poor specimens of missionaries, Lord Salisbury told them, if for their mission they needed the protection of British guns.

Hardest to make proved the sacrifice which the average citizen was called upon to make, viz., the sacrifice of his gun-protected security and the ease to which he had got accustomed under Pax Britannica. Gandhiji spared no pains to make everybody realise that independence when it came would not be found to be all fun and frolic. Independence as he defined it meant not only political and economic but moral independence also. "Political" meant the removal of the control of the British army in every shape and form; "economic", entire freedom from British capitalists and capital, as also their Indian counterparts. And finally, "moral" meant freedom from armed defence forces. It excluded replacement of the British army by a national army of occupation. "A country that is governed by even its national army can never be morally free and, therefore, its so-called weakest member can never rise to his full moral height."[13]

Such was the messianic fervour of his conviction that while in his company, all thought and felt like him. They spoke his language and felt the inspiration of his ideals when he led them to battle. But as the struggle entered upon its final heat and the implications of his stand unfolded themselves more and more, even the boldest shrank back, leaving him to pursue his lonely journey by himself.

6

The decision on Gandhiji's part to stay in the sweepers' colony was to him no mere symbolical act. It was a part of his patient building up of the edifice of Swaraj. On his arrival in the Bhangi Colony, he declared that he did not delude himself into thinking that by staying there he was sharing the actual life of the Harijans. His decision to stay there was the first step in that direction, not the last. He looked forward to the day, he said, when the conditions of life, as regards sanitation, cleanliness and

municipal amenities, etc. in Harijan quarters would be such that even a person like himself might be able to go and stay there without any compunction. He visited their slums and asked his assistants to do the same. He entered into correspondence with the municipal authorities to secure improved conditions of life for them. He studied their problems and gave them his time and advice freely and when the volunteers in charge of the arrangement in his camp held a rally he told them that whilst he was grateful for the loving service they were rendering him, it would give him more satisfaction if they went and served with the same diligence the "lowest of the low", who were his next door neighbours and "who lived in filth and squalor".

Gandhiji found the picture of his free India in its essentials embodied in a song that was sung at one of his evening prayers in Bhangi Colony. It gripped him. He translated it into English and had it sent to Lord Pethick-Lawrence. It was as follows:

We are inhabitants of a country
    where there is no sorrow and no suffering,
Where there is no illusion nor anguish,
    no delusion nor desire,
Where flows the Ganges of love
    and the whole creation is full of joy,
Where all minds flow in one direction,
    and where there is no occasion for sense of time,
All have their wants satisfied;
Here all barter is just,
Here all are cast in the same mould,
Here is no lack nor care,
No selfishness in any shape or form,
No high no low, no master no slave;
All is light, yet no burning heat,
That country is within you—
    It is Swaraj, Swadeshi,
The home within you—
    Victory! Victory! Victory!
He realises it who longs for it.

The spinning-wheel was for Gandhiji the concrete expression and symbol of this Swaraj of his dreams in which the common man would come into his own. He found in it rhythm, music, poetry, romance—even spiritual solace. Nothing gave him greater satisfaction than perhaps the eleven days' class in spinning and the related processes that was organised by Kanu Gandhi sometime later in Bhangi Colony. One hundred and ten persons took the final examination. Generally, the newcomers picked up the art within a week. An exhibition of all the spinning processes was opened by Jayaprakash Narayan, the Socialist leader. A

highlight of the function was a heap of 77 hundred thousand hanks[14] of yarn collected from all over India to be presented to the Mahatma as a gift on his 77th birthday.

Among those who attended the classes were Mr. Norman Cliff of the *News Chronicle*, London, and Mr. Andrew Freeman of the *New York Post*. Both of them learnt to spin and equipped themselves with spinning-wheels. After his retirement from his paper, Mr. Andrew Freeman "as a former member" of one of Gandhiji's spinning classes asked him for permission to use his name to organise "the Gandhi Spinning Society of the United States". Gandhiji's reply was characteristic: "Is it not a mad idea to start a spinning society in America? Mad or wise, why do you want to connect my name with it? Hand-spinning has its own special, universal function. . . . If America is really interested in the hand spinning-wheel it can beat all its previous records of inventive genius. Therefore, I would say, do not belittle a great thing by mixing it up with my name. In your expositions you will have a perfect right to use my name freely and say quite correctly that you owe your enthusiasm for hand-spinning to mine in the same connection in India."

Referring to Andrew Freeman's offer to send him all the yarn spun by the members of the proposed society, he wrote: "Of course, I shall welcome all the hand-spun yarn that you can send to India. Only, let me present you with a joke that will be behind your sending a parcel of yarn all the way to India. . . . The postal charges for sending hand-spun yarn from America would be perhaps 50 times the value of the cotton used in hand-spinning!" But America being "a Mammon-worshipping country" his correspondent, he concluded, could perhaps "afford such expensive jokes"!

7

Idealists are generally classed as visionaries, unpractical people. Gandhiji's idealism was not Utopian. He was no "ineffectual angel beating his luminous wings in the void". He claimed and proved himself to be a practical idealist. He showed how goodness could be made effective. His insistence on truth and full practice thereof gave him a firm hold of reality and endowed him with an unrivalled knowledge of human nature—its potentialities as well as its weaknesses—which enabled him to choose his instruments with an unerring instinct and make heroes out of clay. Perhaps no other person we know of was able to draw round him men and talents of such diverse types as Gandhiji, or to hold them together as a team. "We were an odd assortment," Pandit Nehru has recorded in his inimitable style, "very different from each other; different in our backgrounds, ways of life and ways of thinking, but . . . we . . . grew in the service of a common cause, with a leader to whom . . . (we) looked up . . . from our different viewpoints, as a great and magnificent personality."[15]

His intimate circle, for instance, included shrewd capitalists and businessmen like G. D. Birla, intellectuals and revolutionaries like Pandit Nehru, subtle-minded legal luminaries like Rajaji, humanitarians and patriots like Dr. Rajendra Prasad, profound scholars and divines like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, brilliant medicos—geniuses in their own line—like the late Dr. Ansari and Hakim Ajmal Khan, colourful personalities like the motherly, irreverent Sarojini Naidu, and, last but not least, that Man of Iron, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

What was the secret of his amazing hold over the minds and loyalties of these men, who were heroes in their own rights, and what made them regard him as the best of them and the best part of each of them?

The secret of it lay in his intense and many-sided realism, which drew them to him, and in his tact, deep sympathy, delicacy and personal charm which held them together. For instance, G. D. Birla was drawn to him because he found in him a man of God, who was also a man of the world, and who embodied for him his own ideal of personal purity. Revolutionaries found in him a more thorough-going revolutionary than themselves, with a determination and courage of battle, a spirit of adventure and dauntless defiance which made their own exploits look like a youngster's pranks in comparison. Pandit Nehru, refined and intellectual, was captured by his dynamism joined to a perfect artistry in life. Another statesman, Pandit Nehru's father, once remarked: "I do not believe in his spirituality and never will and I have told him that I shall never believe in God at least in this life. What we find, however, is that in politics he beats us at our own game!" Deshbandhu C. R. Das found in him a passionate dedication to the cause of Indian independence and the readiness to immolate himself for it if necessary, that outmatched his own. The Maulana Saheb found in him a profound religious thinker like himself and a passionate exponent of Eastern culture and tradition which the Maulana so eminently represented in his own person, and a catholicity of outlook which he (the Maulana) had embodied in his monumental researches in the Koran. Rajaji found in him a clarity of thinking and perspicacity, a marvellously quick grasp and capacity to appreciate the opponent's case, and a legal subtlety and acumen which put to shame the forensic acrobatics of legal celebrities of the orthodox type. Dr. Rajendra Prasad found in him his beau-ideal of meekness of spirit and passion for humanitarian service. Dr. Ansari, like many of his contemporary medical celebrities, found in him a fellow-savant, with an experimental outlook and approach to the problem of health and disease as scientific and objective as his own, who by his "quackery"—as he delighted to call his experiments in nature-cure—confounded and set at naught their textbook theories. Sarojini Naidu with her poetic insight, discovered in him a "poet in action"—deliverer from bondage of an ancient, proud people, whom he had taught to stand erect—and a heart as tender and motherly as her own. Lastly, the bridge-player, chain-smoking barrister Vallabhbhai

Patel, sardonically scanning the Indian political scene from the seclusion of his "fritters club" at Ahmedabad, found in the Mahatma a political leader who was no talker, but a man of action, who made things happen and never failed to deliver goods when once he had undertaken to do so. And so, they all became his bondslaves and found it difficult, nay almost impossible, to tear themselves away from his moral and intellectual leadership, and above all, from the leadership of his practical wisdom, when in later years, their varying temperaments and the diverse settings in which they had to function, made it more and more difficult for them to adhere to his ideologies in action.

He claimed to be of the earth, earthy, prone to as many weaknesses as any other human being. He was, therefore, slow to see blemishes in others. He never quarrelled with his tools. He took human nature as it is. Because he excluded the use of brute force he had to delve deep into the secrets of human psychology and master all the varied strings of the human heart, and so he became the greatest moulder of men that our age has seen.

The power and universality of his appeal was due to the fact that he never exploited his instruments. A military dictator uses his soldiers as cannon-fodder to win glory. Gandhiji never put anybody to a use which was not in the best interests of the person concerned. He used his instruments to draw out and develop the best in them so that they grew in strength and stature from day to day.

He never called upon others to make sacrifices for which he was not prepared himself. He was as tolerant of the weaknesses of others as he was intolerant of his own. Remembrance of the hard way by which he had achieved the mastery over self made him tolerant of other people's shortcomings. Knowing how prone human nature is to be biassed in one's own favour, he laid down the maxim that one must view one's own shortcomings by a convex glass, those of others by a concave one. He called it "the duty of exaggeration". He strove consciously to be partial to his opponents, to those who differed from him, in order to be fair.

This spiritual identification with the opponent gave him the power to utter the bluntest truths without causing hurt and to perform the most drastic "spiritual surgery" with the full and joyful co-operation of the subject. It became an asset of the greatest value to him when he had to deal with large numbers of perpetrators of heinous crimes during the communal disturbances.

The fact that he worked through non-violence influenced the choice of his instruments. They included children and illiterate women, even the old and the ailing. Non-violence, he had discovered, best expresses itself through insignificant-looking things, and he was never tired of repeating that his own life was made up of things which taken by themselves looked commonplace and small. If Satyagraha did not turn upon the marshalling of little things, it would be incapable of being wielded by the masses at

large. Women and children constituted the inner core and leaven in all his mass movements and gave to them their swelling energy. No wonder, even in the midst of his round-the-clock preoccupation with the pressing problems of the day, he found time to apply his mind to their problems and even to give massage with his own hands to a leper who had taken asylum with him in his Ashram. And when some Ashram people objected to a leper being kept in their midst, he told them that if there was no room in the Ashram for the leper, there could be none for him either!

He had seen the world, he had lived in the world with his eyes open, gone through the most fiery ordeals that can befall the lot of man. Somehow he had found that he was able to draw out the noblest in human beings and that enabled him to maintain his faith in God and human nature.

He had made a revolution while others had talked about it. When their exuberance had subsided and their lungs were exhausted, they came to him and he showed them how things were done. But while they admired the rebel in him, they failed to appreciate—because it eluded their untrained perception—his capacity for self-surrender and ceaseless striving to reduce himself to zero, from which his power of assault sprang.

8

To Gandhiji the handling of the British Cabinet Mission's negotiations represented another milestone in his endless quest of truth. Public life of his conception he regarded as a testing ground and probation for the highest spiritual qualities in man. His Satyagraha was no mere beatitude but an instrument of action. To man is given control over his actions only, none over the result. But if his actions are an unadulterated expression of the truth within him, all will be well with him in the end in this world no less than in the next. He made no distinction between the two—"all worlds are one". It was his claim that there was no problem mundane or ultra-mundane for which a solution could not be found in terms of truth and non-violence. Whenever in the course of intricate political negotiations a baffling question arose which made everybody feel at sea, it was this God of Truth that he invoked and never once did He fail to come to the rescue.

In present-day diplomacy, acceptance of certain rules of the game is taken for granted. It is all a battle of wits. The actors are expected to have accepted the maxim:

> "The pleasure is as great
> In being cheated as to cheat!"

If "A" successfully outwits his opposite number, or is outwitted in his turn, it is all a part of the game, and no complaint. As against it, Gandhiji pitted his own brand of diplomacy, the diplomacy of truth. It did not exclude the fullest exercise of one's wits. He, too, made concessions,

compromises and adjustments but without compromising his principles; told people to their face the most unpalatable truths but in a manner that did not hurt. The object was never to overreach the opponent. His Satyagraha was not a moral ju-jitsu; rather the opposite. He made the opponent a fellow-seeker in the quest of truth. He aimed not at destroying his power; he transformed and annexed it. In argument he did not seek to overbear or coerce the opponent by intellectual bludgeoning but to win him by showing, or rather helping him to see for himself, the flaw in his position. In doing so, he sometimes discovered a gap in his own. It made the opponent's mind receptive instead of resistant. In the end there was no "victor" or "vanquished" feeling left. Both sides shared in an equal measure the thrill and joy of the discovery of truth and its vindication.

He was so sincere that, as Mr. Laurence Housman once remarked, he made some of them suspicious, so simple and straightforward by nature that he bewildered some of them. These qualities sometimes created very embarrassing situations for his opponents and, at times, even for his friends. For instance, he took everybody at his word. That made it very difficult to tell a lie in his presence. However, if someone tried to palm off something on him which was not sincerely meant, his penetrating eye at once saw through the game. What was more, he expressed his doubt with a most undiplomatic, sometimes devastating — but always good-humoured — frankness. The opponent would protest, thinking that none but a fool would take such diplomatic clap-trap seriously. Gandhiji would readily accept the protest on its face value and the dissimulator would, for the time being, feel well pleased with himself at having so lightly managed to get away with it. But he would soon find that he had reckoned without his host when Gandhiji would confront him with the logical implications of what he had light-heartedly agreed to or conceded, with a moral passion which burnt to the core the hidden lie in the soul. And so, the politicians dubbed him a saint who queered the pitch of politics by injecting his mysticism into it and the religious set called him a "politician in disguise". He was neither. But since truth is the highest wisdom, his acts generally conformed with the highest statesmanship. And whilst he declared that he would not sacrifice Truth or Non-violence even for the deliverance of his country or religion, this was as much as to say "that neither can (could) be so delivered".[16] His moral decisions were not taken blindly. With all his transcendent faith he insisted on subjecting all his actions to the pragmatic test. Only, when others stopped short where their reason failed them, he marched on upheld by his faith.

His life was an indivisible whole. All his activities ran into one another. They had their common root in his passion for truth. Even behind his indignant revolt against British rule was his deep moral earnestness which was outraged by the spectacle of the utter demoralisation of four hundred millions of India's humanity who dared not speak what they felt, whose cowardly existence had become a living lie and a denial of God under

the incubus of foreign rule. Not a little of his dynamic power was derived from his impassioned devotion to truth and the importance he attached to "moral freedom".

His unremitting striving for truth endowed him with a clarity of thinking, a mastery of details and finally that "unerring hunch" which aroused the envy and admiration of seasoned diplomats and statesmen of the orthodox school. It further gave him that uncanny instinct, almost like the sixth sense — the result of uttermost refinement and heightened sensitivity of the psyche — which enabled him to detect untruth and corruption not visible to the common eye.

Truth with him was not a rigid dogma or a static formula but a myriad-sided, flexible, ever growing living dialectic. It made his personality rich, varied and full of paradoxes which sometimes baffled and at other times irritated superficial observers with inelastic minds. For instance, he believed in simplicity but not in slovenliness. His simplicity was not so simple an affair, as he put it; it was "a highly complex art". A perfect artistry gave it an ineffable charm. The "half-naked fakir" found himself at home with Viceroys, potentates and heads of States. He denounced materialism but did more to provide elementary material comforts for the millions than anyone else and even went so far as to say that God appeared to the hungry in the form of bread. He wanted people to be ready for all sort of hardships and sufferings that might fall to their lot in bearing witness to truth, but he never made a cult of discomfort for its own sake. He believed in living in the face of danger but not in "living dangerously". He believed in self-suffering but there was not a trace of the martyrdom complex in his psychological make up. Indeed, he regarded the desire for martyrdom to be unethical, sinful, since it can be fulfilled only at the cost of someone else's perdition.

He was the greatest democrat alive but he had no hesitation in proposing himself as the sole Congress delegate at the Second Round Table Conference or the Congress dictator during civil-disobedience campaigns. Again, his dictatorship had no sanction behind it save that of love and persuasion, and he was the fittest person to be a dictator because he hated to dictate to anybody.

Having constituted himself the champion of downtrodden and oppressed humanity, he steeled his heart against weak pity. He could be cruel to be kind, because he knew that in this hard, cruel world weakness gets no quarter. And so, while non-violence was the breath of his life, he could talk unperturbed of India attaining her freedom through "rivers of blood" — not of the opponent but of her own innocent children.

9

On more than one occasion at a crucial stage in the Cabinet Mission's negotiations two philosophies of action contested the stage — the philosophy

of "ends and means" on which Gandhiji's life was built, and the British philosophy of empiricism which the Cabinet Delegation represented. Gandhiji believed that if we keep the means unadulterated, the ends will take care of themselves. The Cabinet Mission proceeded on the principle that one has at times to make compromises even with principle for the sake of expediency and choose "the lesser evil". When the Cabinet Mission and all the Indian parties found themselves on the horns of a dilemma, Gandhiji sent Lord Pethick-Lawrence an advance copy of his article in *Harijan* entitled *The Unknown:*

Some learned men describe Him as Unknowable, some others as Unknown, yet others as "Not This"....

When yesterday I said a few words to the prayer audience, I could say nothing more than that they should pray for and rely upon the strength and the guidance that this big X could give. There were difficulties to be overcome by all parties in the great Indian drama that was being enacted before them. They were all to rely upon the Unknown who had often confounded man's wisdom and in the twinkling of an eye upset his tin-pot plans. The British party claimed to believe in God the Unknown....

In spite of my irrepressible optimism I am unable to say decisively that, at least in political parlance, the thing is safe. All I can say, therefore, is that if, with the best efforts of all the parties, the unsafe happens, I would invite them to join with me in saying that it was as well and that safety lay in unsafety.[17]

To this Lord Pethick-Lawrence replied: "I, too, have a strong feeling, where I am dependent on forces outside myself, that I must be content to accept the will of the Divinity that you call X; and that sometimes in Bjornsen's words a result may be 'uber unserer kraft' (beyond our power). But where a decision of my own enters in I have a grave responsibility to all those who will be affected by it, to make it aright."[18]

Lord Pethick-Lawrence, however, proceeded to show that the attitude he represented did not rule out faith just as Gandhiji's faith did not rule out the exercise of reason: "Did I ever tell you the following story illustrating the profound human belief in the rightness of things lying behind injustice? A parson said to a farmer who was worried about something, 'Put your trust in Providence, my man.' 'No,' said the farmer, 'I have no trust in Providence. He lost me my pig two years ago. He let my home be burnt last year. He took away my wife last summer. No, I refuse to trust in Providence. But I will tell you what. There is a power above Him who will pull him up if he goes too far!' "

The fundamental difference between the two attitudes is, however, there for all to see. If faith be "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen," belief in the "rightness of things lying behind injustice" should never lead to a compromise with the dubious in the pursuit of the good. For it is given to mortals control over their actions

only, none over the fruit of their actions. Faith has, therefore, to step in where reason fails, to enable us to persevere in the right means and see safety in unsafety, if the "unsafe" happens in spite of all human foresight and care. One may not substitute the expedient for the right because the latter appears to be "unsafe". As Prof. Jacks has put it, it is just where certainty ends that morality begins. Unfortunately, the attitude of empiricism prevailed. The result we know. What might have been the course of Indian history if Gandhiji's approach had been tried for settling the Indo-British question must for ever remain a speculation in the world's might-have-beens.

CHAPTER VIII

A TANGLED TALE

1

GANDHIJI HAD given the battle to the British Power by non-violent non-cooperation and civil-disobedience. When the repression was at its height, he had sustained the struggle through depression and set-back by constructive non-violence. It was now to be continued on the plane of negotiation. The instruments were the same — truth and non-violence — as also the goal viz., conversion of the opponent for which self-suffering had paved the way. The appeal previously was addressed mainly to the heart, to evoke sympathy which is the beginning of understanding; it was now going to be made to the head. The disciplines it called forth also were the same as were required during the Satyagraha fight viz., resourcefulness, resilience, self-control, patience, endurance and skill in action; above all, an all-embracing love.

The three members of the Cabinet Delegation—Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr. A. V. Alexander—arrived at the Karachi airport on the 23rd March, 1946, and reached Delhi the following day. From the 1st to the 17th April, they occupied themselves with interviewing representative Indians, meeting 472 leaders in 182 sittings in the effort "to arrive at the greatest common measure of agreement" among the various parties.

They began well. Shedding bureaucratic prestige and British stand-offishness, they established contact on a personal level with the Indian leaders. After the first week, hope began to soar high that an Interim National Government at the Centre would be set up before long. The hope proved to be premature. Its fulfilment depended on the preparedness of the British Government to hand over power to whichever party they trusted and which was prepared to shoulder the burden. It was because they had fought shy of this that the Simla talks of 1945 had failed. Mr. Attlee's announcement in the Parliament had led people to believe that the old history would not be repeated.

In the second week of April, Mr. Woodrow Wyatt, a member of the Cabinet Delegation staff, saw Gandhiji. "Do you think we are getting off your back?" he asked.

"I feel you will. But you must have the strength."

Mr. Wyatt mentioned the difficulty created by the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan. "Supposing we imposed what we considered to be a just solution and went?"

"All would be upset."

"So it must be left to India's decision?"

"Yes, leave it to the Congress and the League. Thanks to Jinnah's genius and British cooperation, he has built up a powerful organisation comprehending not all but the major part of the Muslims. I will advise you to try him and if you feel he cannot deliver the goods, take the Congress into your confidence . . . . But in any case the British occupation must end forthwith."

"And what happens after the British leave?"

"Probably there will be arbitration . . . . But there might be a blood-bath. It will be settled in two days by non-violence if I can persuade India to go my way, or the ordeal may last longer. Even so, it would not be worse than what it is under the British rule . . . ."

"Suppose we set up an Interim Government and went? . . . If the Congress concedes Pakistan, it will then be their job."

"That will be a good beginning. Even if the whole of India goes under the League in this way, it won't matter. It won't be the Pakistan of Jinnah's conception. India would then have something to live for and die for."

"Whom shall we put in the place of the present Government?"

"You can ask the elected legislators to nominate their representatives. Supposing the Congress has an overwhelming majority, she will choose the names for the Interim Government. If the Congress can come to terms with the League, there will be no difficulty. But if Jinnah should ultimately choose not to come in, Congress and you must not be frightened. Or, as I have already said, you let Jinnah nominate out of the present legislators."

"Supposing the Muslim League starts destruction, will you jail them?" finally asked Mr. Wyatt.

"I won't," replied Gandhiji. "But may be the Congress will decide to fight. It will then be a clean fight, not the cowardly hit-and-run that you see today or taking of a hundred lives for one *a la* the British."

The Cabinet Delegation had, however, come to the conclusion that as a result of successive adjustments between the Congress and the League, a stage had been reached when in fact what the Congress was prepared or could be prevailed upon to concede was not far different from what the Muslim League wanted or would accept if sufficient pressure was applied.

"Where agreement has to be arrived at," remarked Sir Stafford in the course of an interview with Sir Gopalswami Ayyangar, "it may be necessary for the party even with the strongest case agreeing to accept something less than what it may rightly be considered entitled to *in order to avoid a possible decision against them.*"[1] (Italics mine). Had it not happened in Indian history already that the country had settled down to decisions which when given did not please any party, the Communal Award, for instance?

Sir Gopalswami suggested that the acquiescence then was due to the fact that the British were there to enforce the decision. Under the changed circumstances the only chance of a decision of theirs being implemented successfully was that it should be justifiable on merits. If so, did it not rule out Jinnah's Pakistan?

Sir Stafford agreed that Jinnah's Pakistan was an "impossible idea". Even the League had realised it. "When I find a person getting louder and more violent in his denunciation of his opponents, I get the feeling . . . that he is beginning to recognise that the extreme case for which he stands is becoming desperate." And again: "I may tell you that in spite of all the violent speeches that have been made within the last two days at the Muslim Convention, leading representatives of the Muslim community are, even as we are talking now, furiously thinking as to how best they could moderate their published demands."

Sir Stafford's interviewer asked whether in that case the more effective way of making Jinnah climb down from his extravagantly high perch would not be for the Cabinet Delegation to give him as early as possible a broad hint that there was no possibility of Pakistan being agreed to by the Mission or His Majesty's Government?

Sir Stafford admitted that that would be more effective but in their judgment, the time was not yet for making known "even in an informal way what might be our ultimate decision even if we had reached one already."

That provided a fair indication of the line which the Cabinet Delegation proposed to take.

* * *

On the 17th April, the Cabinet Mission adjourned for a short recess and left for Kashmir on a seven days' holiday to review the results of the interviews and informal talks with the leaders. They returned to Delhi on the 24th April, and on the 27th April, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, in a letter addressed to the Presidents of the Congress and the Muslim League suggested that they should make "one further attempt to obtain agreement between the Muslim League and the Congress."

As a basis of agreement, they suggested a scheme the "fundamental principles" of which were that there should be a Union Government dealing with Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications. There would be two groups of Provinces, the one of the predominantly Hindu Provinces, and the other of the predominantly Muslim Provinces. These groups would deal with all other subjects which the Provinces in respective groups might desire to be dealt with in common. The Provincial Governments would deal with all other subjects and would have all the residuary sovereign rights. If the Muslim League and the Congress were prepared to enter into negotiations on this basis, Lord Pethick-Lawrence's letter proceeded, arrangements would be made for them to meet in a conference together with the Cabinet Mission (probably at Simla), and to that end would

the Congress President be so good as to send the names of four persons appointed to negotiate on their behalf?

The Congress was opposed to the formation of groups on communal lines with a separate legislature and executive machinery for each group. It objected, too, to compulsion in the early stages for a Province to join a particular group. "In any event," wrote the Congress President in reply to Lord Pethick-Lawrence's letter, "it would be wholly wrong to compel a Province to function against its own wish."[2] For instance, why should the Frontier Province, which was clearly a Congress Province, be compelled to join the group hostile to the Congress? The Congress did not rule out the formation of groups if the Provinces so desired, but felt that this was a matter "which could very well be left open for decision by the Constituent Assembly."

"You have referred to certain 'fundamental principles'," the Congress President went on to say, "but there is no mention of the basic issue before us, that is, Indian independence and the consequent withdrawal of the British Army from India. It is only on this basis that we can discuss the future of India or any interim arrangement. While we are ready to carry on negotiations with any party as to the future of India, we must state our conviction that reality will be absent from any negotiations whilst an outside ruling power still exists in India."

The Cabinet Delegation explained that acceptance of the invitation to the proposed conference would not imply preliminary acceptance or approval of the terms suggested. The Congress President thereupon accepted the invitation to attend the conference. The Muslim League agreed to participate in the conference without "commitment or prejudice" to its position as set forth in its Lahore resolution of 1940, on Pakistan, and confirmed at the Muslim League Legislators' Convention on the 9th April, 1946.

On the afternoon of the 28th April, while the Working Committee was still engaged in examining the Cabinet Delegation's proposal, Gandhiji received a message from the Cabinet Delegation that Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Sir Stafford Cripps would like to meet him urgently either at Bhangi Colony or in the gardens in the Viceroy's House. They preferred the latter as they wanted the meeting to be private, and if they came to Bhangi Colony it would attract publicity. Gandhiji went to see them at dusk. As they sat talking by the side of the circular pool in the Viceroy's garden, Gandhiji discovered that all was not well within the Congress ranks. The Cabinet Delegation, it seems, had received a letter from one of Gandhiji's Congress colleagues about which neither Gandhiji nor the Working Committee had any knowledge. It was not the contents of the letter that mattered to Gandhiji but the attendant circumstances. He was shocked. On his return he mentioned it to two friends—one of them a member of the Working Committee. They could scarcely believe it. They felt that Gandhiji must have either misheard or misunderstood what he

had been told. But Gandhiji was emphatic: "I am neither deaf nor so stupid as not to be able to hear and correctly report a simple thing like that." The next day, Sir Stafford saw Gandhiji with the letter in question. "As we were talking to you last evening," said Sir Stafford, "you seemed to us to be unaware of this. So we thought we had better straighten out this matter with you." Gandhiji showed the letter that Sir Stafford had brought to his doubting colleagues and it was now their turn to be surprised.

The Cabinet Delegation desired Gandhiji's presence at Simla so as to be available for consultation and advice during the conference. Gandhiji agreed but made it clear that he could give advice only as a friend and well-wisher of the British people and the Cabinet Mission. The Congress viewpoint could be represented only by the Maulana Saheb, its President, or Pandit Nehru. If his advice ran counter to that of Pandit Nehru, for instance, Gandhiji told them, they should follow Pandit Nehru's advice rather than his. But he felt disturbed within himself. He did not like precedence being given to the details of constitution-making over the transfer of power. "You do not know, how uneasy I feel," he wrote to Sir Stafford. "Something is wrong."[3]

To Gandhiji the atom always reflected the universe, the immediate provided the key to the general. "There is a crisis within a crisis," he remarked to Agatha Harrison on arrival at Simla, "a crisis within and a crisis without." He had only one remedy for such a situation, viz., to throw himself entirely on God. He proceeded to apply it in his own case. As the text for his evening after-prayer discourse that day, he chose the first verse of his favourite *Ishopanishad*: "Surrender all to Him and then use for His service what is absolutely necessary—not a jot more." "All must be surrendered to Him in the first instance," he commented, "and then His work carried on with whatever material may come through His grace."

Putting it in the context of his own dilemma, he cogitated aloud: "All should be the same to one who has surrendered everything to God. I would be a wretched guide for the Congress, the Cabinet Mission and others, if I allowed the feeling of attachment to weigh with me. . . . My guidance must be unalloyed. If you are surrounded by your family, they divide your attention in however small or subtle a measure. I wish in this crisis to give my undivided self to God. In the present context it means that I must, as a test of my sincerity, strip myself of the service of my trained assistants and fend for myself with whatever assistance He may send. Even if someone offers to help in their absence, it will put me on my test. For, if things go wrong from tomorrow, I shall hold nobody responsible for it but myself and if I break down under the test, I shall say, 'I was weighed in the balance and found wanting'."

He asked me to put the matter to my colleagues, if what he had said appealed to my heart. He did not want to take any step, he said,

if he could not have our fullest cooperation. "Faith cannot be divided. Either we trust Him wholly or not at all. It is a test of my faith as well as yours." I put it to my colleagues. They readily agreed. "It will be as you wish," I told him. "We shall be returning to Delhi by the first available train."

I wondered what the Sardar would have to say of our decision. But to my most agreeable surprise when I communicated the decision to him, he only said: "You are right. We may not always be able to follow him in his upward flight or even to grasp his reasoning fully. But we have no right to stand in his way." The next day Gandhiji announced to the Press that he had decided to send back his permanent staff to Delhi to "put myself (himself) solely in God's keeping".

2

The conference at Simla continued its labours from 5th May to the 12th May. After it had met for two days, the Cabinet Mission put forth some further "suggested points for agreement" in the light of the discussions that had taken place. As a concession to the Congress viewpoint the original list of the Union subjects, viz., Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications was enlarged by the addition of "Fundamental Rights", and it was proposed that the Union Government should have the necessary powers to obtain for itself the finances it required for those subjects. To make the Union acceptable to the League it was suggested that the Constituent Assembly should divide up into three sections, one representing the Hindu-majority Provinces, the second representing the Muslim-majority Provinces and the third representing the States. The first two sections would then meet separately and decide Provincial constitutions for their groups and, if they wished, group constitutions. To counter-balance the Congress objection to the compulsory grouping of Provinces in the Section, the Cabinet Mission proposed that a Province should have the freedom to opt out of the original group and go to another group or remain out of any group by a majority of the votes of its representatives, if the Provincial or group constitution was not acceptable to it. The three sections would then meet together to frame the Union constitution.

Under the Union constitution, there would thus be three sub-federations: one of the Muslim-majority Provinces, another of the Hindu-majority Provinces and the third of the States. The Muslim-majority Provinces would have a parity of representation in the Union Legislature as well as in the Union Government with the Hindu-majority Provinces irrespective of whether the Provinces in question formed themselves into groups or not. Further, to compensate the League for the possible loss, through opting out, of the N.-W.F.P. from the Muslim-majority group and for the exclusion of Assam from the same, which the League demanded for the Muslim-majority group, it was proposed that there

should be the additional safeguard that no measure affecting a communal issue in the Union constitution would be passed unless the majority of both the major communities voted in its favour.

The Congress was prepared to accept the formation of groups provided it was entirely optional. It, however, held that this would be for the representatives of the Provinces to decide *after* the Constituent Assembly had framed the constitution for the all-India Federal Union. The Muslim League, on the other hand, demanded that there should be a separate constitution-making body for the six "Muslim Provinces", namely, the Punjab, the N.-W.F.P., Baluchistan, Sind, Bengal and Assam (although Assam was a Hindu-majority Province) from the very beginning. After the constitutions of the Pakistan Federal Government and the Provinces were framed the constitution-making bodies of the two groups—Pakistan group and the Hindustan group—sitting together would deal with the three subjects, namely, Foreign Affairs, Defence and "Communications necessary for Defence".

There were other points of difference. The Congress wanted the Union Government to have the power to raise the finances required for the discharge of its functions by taxation. The Muslim League insisted that the Federal Union should in no event have the power to raise revenues in its own right but only by contribution. The League further wanted that no decision —legislative, executive or administrative —should be taken by the Union in regard to any matter of a controversial nature except by a majority of three-fourths.

The whole approach and the outlook of the Cabinet Mission, it was clear, was different from that of the Congress. "I confess to feeling somewhat mystified and disturbed at the vagueness of our talks and some assumptions underlying them," wrote the Congress President on the 6th May to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, after the first session of the conference at Simla. "There can be no independence so long as there is a foreign army on Indian soil. We stand for the independence for the whole of India now and not in the distant or near future. Other matters are subsidiary to this and can be fitly discussed and decided by the Constituent Assembly. . . . The Constituent Assembly is not going to decide the question of independence; that question must be and, we take it, has been decided now."

If that was so, the Congress President went on to say, certain consequences inevitably followed. The Constituent Assembly would then represent "the will of the free Indian nation and give effect to it". For that it would have to be preceded by a Provisional Government "which must function, as far as possible, as a Government of free India, and which should undertake to make all arrangements for the transitional period."

But the Cabinet Mission were not prepared for it at that stage. They intended to keep it in reserve as an inducement for the parties to close

the gap in their respective viewpoints in regard to the future constitution of India which in their opinion had already been narrowed down by the Congress agreeing to the principle of grouping in respect of the Provinces and by the Muslim League accepting a Union Government for the whole of India. It would have been a real narrowing down of the gap if the give and take had taken place as a result of a genuine understanding between the Congress and the League in pursuit of a common goal. They would then have been forced to take note of realities. But the presence of the third party, which held the balance of power in its hands, vitiated the reality and it all became manœuvring for position. While the Congress had agreed to the optional grouping of the Provinces and the Muslim veto on communal issues in order to allay the anxiety of the Muslims so that Hindus and Muslims might be able to live together as one nation in their common motherland, the Muslim League regarded the concessions as a strategic gain in its battle for Pakistan.

The Congress recorded its emphatic opinion that it was not open to the conference to entertain any division of India. "If this is (was) to come, it should come through the Constituent Assembly free from any influence of the present governing power."[4]

As had been feared from the very beginning, the difficulty about parity in regard to the executive or the legislature as between seven Hindu-majority Provinces, comprising a population of 19 crores and the five Muslim-majority Provinces with a population of little over 9 crores, proved insurmountable. "This is worse than Pakistan," wrote Gandhiji to Sir Stafford Cripps on the 8th May. As a way out he suggested that an "impartial non-British tribunal should award on this as on any other matters of difference otherwise incapable of adjustment" between the League and the Congress.

At the Simla Conference in 1945, the Congress had accepted the principle of caste-Hindu Muslim parity in the teeth of Gandhiji's advice to accept sub-parity for the Hindus as a voluntary concession. However unwarrantably generous this might appear, he had pleaded, it was not incompatible with democracy. But statutory parity between the communities would make a mockery of democracy itself. But his warning had gone unheeded and the Congress High Command's experiment with expediency had now come home to roost with a vengeance. Although the Congress President had made it clear at Simla Conference in 1945 that the Congress accepted parity as "purely temporary and interim and (it) should not possibly be regarded as the permanent arrangement of the future"[5] they were now confronted with the prospect of parity in the Union Legislature as well as in the Union Government being made a permanent feature of the future constitution of India.

The Congress was prepared to do anything within the bounds of reason to remove fear and suspicion from the mind of any Province or community, but it felt itself unable to endorse "unreal methods" which

went against the "basic method of democracy" on which they hoped to build up their constitution.[6]

Failure of the conference now seemed inevitable. The Congress, thereupon, suggested that an umpire should be appointed by the Congress and the Muslim League to settle matters of difference between the parties. The suggestion was turned down by the League.

On the 12th May, it was announced that the conference had failed to bring the Congress and the League to an agreement. The members of the Cabinet Mission thereupon returned to Delhi.

3

The patience of nationalist India was by now well-nigh exhausted and the earlier hopes aroused by the Cabinet Delegation's pronouncements had begun to wilt. As early as the 2nd April, Gandhiji had suggested to Lord Pethick-Lawrence two steps to give the people a foretaste of independence. The first was to order the immediate release of political prisoners, including those who might be charged with offences involving violence in the struggle for freedom. They could not be a danger to the State now that the necessity for independence had become common cause. It seemed to be ridiculous, therefore, to keep a person like Jayaprakash Narayan or Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia in prison. "Nor is there any occasion for treating any person as an underground worker. To leave the question of discharge for disposal by the incoming National Government would be a step no-one will understand or appreciate. Independence will lose its grace."

The other proposal affected the masses. It referred to the salt tax. Salt tax was an iniquitous and unpopular tax like the notorious *gabelle*, or Government monopoly in salt in France, condemned as one of the most serious financial evils in the famous *Cahiers*, which heralded the French revolution. It had been denounced by Sir James Westland (1888), Lord Cross, Secretary of State for India, Sir John Gorst, Under Secretary of State for India (in the House of Commons, 1890), Sir Evelyn Baring (Earl of Cromer), and lately by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, who characterised it as "an exaction and oppression . . . a survival of the general exploitation of India's poverty by a profit-making company."[7] Its abolition had been an integral part of the Congress demand for over half a century. Patriots like Dadabhai Naoroji, Wacha, Pherozeshah Mehta and Gokhale had waged an unceasing battle for it.

In anticipation of the Cabinet Mission's arrival, Gandhiji had represented the matter to Lord Wavell on the 6th March, 1946, only to receive the following summary reply: "Mr. Gandhi's suggestion that all restrictions on private manufacture (of salt) should be removed has been examined, and I am afraid that . . . Government do not find themselves able to accept the suggestion."[8]

In a letter to Lord Pethick-Lawrence on the day after his arrival in Delhi, Gandhiji wrote: "As a means of raising revenue it is insignificant. The masses will hardly appreciate independence if the burden of the salt monopoly continues to afflict them."[9]

Sir Archibald Rowlands, the Finance Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, saw Gandhiji on the 5th April, with a view to understand from him his proposal in detail. At the end of it he owned that he was completely converted to Gandhiji's viewpoint. Referring to it Gandhiji wrote next day to Lord Wavell: "At the conclusion of our talk, he (Sir Archibald) was frank enough to tell me that had he met me three months ago the tax would have been abolished. . . . He now contemplates abolition within three months or so. . . . I invoke your assistance in this humanitarian work. But more even than that is the consideration that I put before the Cabinet Delegation, viz., that independence should be ushered in with the greatest good grace which the poorest villager in the remotest village can at once realise."

Later it transpired that the Finance Member was pulled up by the Viceroy for meeting Gandhiji directly. He told a common friend apologetically that he would be unable to meet Gandhiji again for reasons which he explained. It was only when Gandhiji took up the matter strongly with Lord Wavell in their next meeting that the embargo was removed and the Finance Member was able to resume talks with Gandhiji under the Viceroy's "instructions"!

Political prisoners were thereafter gradually released. Jayaprakash and Dr. Lohia were released on the 12th April. The release of the Indian National Army under-trial prisoners was ordered two days later. But the question of the abolition of the salt tax continued to hang fire. Gandhiji again took up the matter with the Viceroy at Simla on the 3rd May: "Salt is not off my brain. For the sake of English honour I say that there should not be a day's delay about the abolition of this monopoly. It is to impress upon His Excellency what the monopoly has meant that I enclose herewith an additional note prepared by Shri Pyarelal."[10]

The Viceroy's reply was again disappointing. It drew from Gandhiji a sharp rejoinder:

> This is a fine instance of how the irresponsible mind works. You were good enough to tell me last Monday...that the British did not care for credit.... The corollary to your dictum seems to be that the British would not mind the discredit of any action.
>
> The only straight answer from my mind which thinks ever of the masses and is responsible and responsive to them would be to abolish the hateful monopoly and tax...especially in these days of famine.[11]

"It would be a hard blow to Jinnah and the Muslim League," the Private Secretary to the Viceroy remarked to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur with reference to Gandhiji's proposal. Was that the reason for

the Viceroy's reluctance—viz., it would add to the prestige of the Congress and displease Jinnah? Later events seemed to point to that direction. Its ominous significance was not lost upon Gandhiji.

4

On the 16th May, with the "full approval of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom", the Cabinet Delegation published their own recommendations to "ensure a speedy setting up of a new constitution". Their plan consisted of two parts: the long term plan for the setting up of a constitution-making body and the short term proposal for the formation of an "Interim Government having the support of the major political parties" who might be willing to accept the statement of the 16th May.

The issue was whether India was to be partitioned or whether it was to remain undivided. The Muslim League contended that Muslims would find themselves under a perpetual Hindu-majority rule in a purely unitary India. It, therefore, demanded that the country should be partitioned and two areas—one in the north-west, consisting of the Provinces of the Punjab, Sind, the North-West Frontier and Baluchistan; and the other in the north-east consisting of the Provinces of Bengal and Assam—should be formed into a separate, fully independent Muslim State of Pakistan, which would assure the Muslims full control in all matters vital to their culture, religion and economic and other interests. But while claiming for the Muslim-majority areas the right to decide their method of Government according to their wishes, the League was not willing to concede the same right to substantial areas in which non-Muslims were in a majority and which it claimed for Pakistan on the ground of necessity to make Pakistan administratively and economically viable. For instance, it wanted the whole of Assam, although 66 per cent. of its population was non-Muslim, and parts of the Punjab and Bengal where non-Muslims comprised the overwhelming majority. This particularly affected the Sikhs in the Punjab, who strongly objected to being arbitrarily assigned to Pakistan for the very reason for which the Muslim League demanded the separation of the Muslim zones from the rest of India. Then, there was the North-West Frontier Province. It had a predominantly Muslim population but a Congress Ministry was in power there. It had never accepted the Muslim League ideology, particularly its "two-nation theory" and its plan of Pakistan. The 1946 election in the N.-W. F. P. had been fought specifically on that issue and the electorate had given its clear verdict against it.

Every argument that could be advanced in favour of Pakistan could equally be used for the exclusion of non-Muslim areas from Pakistan. The Cabinet Delegation, therefore, in their plan of 16th May, after careful consideration, turned down the proposition of a separate

and fully independent sovereign State of Pakistan as demanded by the Muslim League. Similarly, they rejected the proposition of a "smaller sovereign Pakistan" confined to the Muslim-majority areas alone. Jinnah had already denounced the latter as a "truncated and moth-eaten Pakistan" wholly unacceptable to the Muslim League, and the Sikhs were determined to resist at any cost the dismemberment of their community which the division of the Punjab would involve. Events were yet in the making which later swept off their feet even the most ardent opponents of the partition and made the vivisection of the country appear as the lesser evil and the only means of averting a worse calamity.

In place of the Muslim League's demand of Pakistan, the Cabinet Delegation recommended their "three-tier scheme" of 16th May foreshadowed in their suggested points for agreement at the Simla Conference. There would be a Union of British India and the Princely States on the top, which would deal with the three subjects of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications. The bottom tier would consist of the Provinces and States in whom would vest all residuary powers. This was coupled with an arrangement giving to the Provinces freedom to form groups with executives and legislatures. These would constitute the middle tier. The grouping was intended to give the Muslim League the "substance of Pakistan".

The procedure laid down for grouping was that after the preliminary meeting of the entire constitution-making body, the representatives of the Provinces would meet in three Sections: A, B and C; B consisting of the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Baluchistan and Sind; C of Bengal and Assam; and A of the remaining Provinces which were not included in either of the other two Sections. The Sections would then proceed to settle the Provincial constitutions for the Provinces included in each Section and also decide whether any group constitution should be set up for these Provinces. Finally, it was provided that any Province should have the power to opt out of a group by a decision of the legislature of the Province *elected under the new constitution*, if the constitution as it ultimately emerged was not to its liking. It was hoped that this arrangement would satisfy the Muslim League's demand for separate Muslim zones in the north-west and the north-east, while at the same time it would preserve intact the conception of a united India with a common Centre though with limited functions.

The Frankenstein of communalism whom the British power had themselves, in the first instance, cradled into being and intransigence in pursuit of their "divide and rule" policy had by now developed a volition of its own and backed by Tory die-hards, was no longer amenable to persuasion. Convinced of the impracticability and harmfulness of the division of India on the one hand, and confronted by the Muslim League's inflexible demand for a sovereign Pakistan on the other, the Cabinet Mission were forced to resort to the doubtful expedient of the

"ambiguous middle". Their 16th May plan was fashioned somewhat after the heroine in one of Goethe's classics in whose lineaments everybody saw the image of his own beloved. There was in it something for everybody. To the Congress it offered a common Centre, though in an attenuated form, and "freedom" of choice to Provinces to form groups or not. To the Muslim League it held out the prospect of "Muslim zones" to be formed in the north-west and the north-east of India by making it obligatory on the representatives of the Provinces to sit in Sections to settle the Provincial constitutions. To the Princes it offered release from Paramountcy which was not to be transferred to the successor Government. To the Sikhs it held out the prospect of preserving intact the integrity of their homeland.

The difficulty was that what appeared to be conceded in the earlier part of the plan was practically cancelled by provisions in the later part. There was an obvious conflict between the language used in para 15 clause (5) and in para 19 sub-clauses (iv) and (v) of the plan. While the former said that "*Provinces* should be free to form groups, executives and legislatures, and each group *could determine* the Provincial subjects to be taken together" (Italics mine) the latter could be so construed as practically to force Assam, which was a non-Muslim Province, to join the Muslim-dominated Group C; and the North-West Frontier Province, where a Congress Ministry was functioning, to join the Muslim League dominated Group B against the will of its chosen representatives. It ran: "Thereafter the Provincial representatives will divide up in three Sections. . . . These *Sections* shall proceed to settle the Provincial constitutions . . . and shall decide whether any group constitution shall be set up for those Provinces." (Italics mine).

True, freedom was left to the Provinces to "opt out" some time after the election under the new constitution to be framed by the Section in their constitution-making capacity by a majority of the legislators of the Provinces under the new constitution. But this was really begging the point. Sections B and C had been so formed that it was obvious that one Province, viz., the Punjab would play a dominating role in Section B and Bengal in Section C. Both had a big Muslim League majority and a large quantum of representation and it was conceivable that these dominating Provinces might in their respective Sections frame Provincial constitutions entirely against the wishes of the other partners, viz., Sind, the North-West Frontier Province and Assam. They might "even conceivably lay down rules for elections and otherwise, thereby nullifying the provision for a Province to opt out of a group."[12]

Thus, whereas under the grouping arrangement proposed at the Simla Conference in May, 1946, the right to opt out of the original group, if the group constitution or the Provincial constitution framed by the group was not to the liking of a Province, rested with the Province itself, now that freedom was in effect taken away from the Province and

made over to the majority in the Section which would settle the Provincial constitutions.

For instance, in Assam, there were 34.42 lakhs of Muslims as against 67.50 lakhs of non-Muslims. But the latter included 24.84 lakhs of tribals. The Muslim League's plan was well known. It was to separate the tribals from the Hindus, give them separate electorates and promise of autonomy and convert Assam into a Muslim-majority Province by organising a mass immigration of Muslims from some of the densely overpopulated border districts of Bengal. This, with the cooperation of the European element, who enjoyed an outrageous weightage under the existing constitution, would render it virtually impossible for Assam to opt out of Group C. The position of representation of the various communities in Section C in the Constituent Assembly stood as follows:

	Muslim	*European*	*Others*	*Total*
Bengal	33	5	22	60
Assam	3	1	6	10

The Muslim League was not slow to take advantage of the language of para 19. Jinnah declared that he found in the Cabinet Delegation's plan the "basis of Pakistan" and accordingly, the Muslim League Council, on the 6th June, resolved that "inasmuch as the bases and the foundation of Pakistan are inherent in the Mission's plan, by virtue of compulsory grouping of the six Muslim Provinces" in Sections B and C, they were "willing to co-operate with the constitution-making machinery proposed . . . by the Mission." No secret was made of the hope that "it would ultimately result in the establishment of complete sovereign Pakistan" which had *ab initio* been ruled out by the Cabinet Delegation in their statement.

The Mission were in a quandary. Thanks to the logic of the past policies of successive British Governments, they found themselves in a position where almost anything that they did put them in the wrong. Their difficulty, however, was no vindication of the inherent defects in their plan. Gandhiji pointed out those defects as also the way out.

In the course of their meeting, after the announcement of the Cabinet Mission's 16th May plan, Lord Pethick-Lawrence had assured Gandhiji in reply to a question by him that the whole basis of their plan was voluntary. There was no element of compulsion in it anywhere. If that was so, argued Gandhiji, the rest could be straightened out by the method of interpretation. He applied his legal mind to the task before him. Even when he had practised as a lawyer, he had looked upon law as a system of "codified ethics" for the vindication of truth and justice. Referring to the 16th May plan, in an article in *Harijan*, he wrote:

After four days of searching examination of the State Paper issued by the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy on behalf of the British Government my

conviction abides that it is the best document the British Government could have produced in the circumstances.

My compliment, however, does not mean that what is best from the British standpoint is also best or even good from the Indian. Their best may possibly be harmful....

It is an appeal and an advice. It has no compulsion in it. Thus the Provincial assemblies may or may not elect the delegates. The delegates, having been elected may or may not join the Constituent Assembly. The Assembly having met, may lay down procedure different from the one laid down in the statement. Whatever is binding on any person or party arises out of the necessity of the situation.

Therefore, when Lord Pethick-Lawrence said to a Press correspondent, 'If they do come together on that basis, it will mean that they will have accepted that basis, but they can still change it, if by a majority of each party they desire to do so', he was right in the sense that those who become delegates, well knowing the contents of the Statement were expected by the authors to abide by the basis, unless it were duly altered by the major parties....

This is perfect so far. But what about the Units? Are the Sikhs, for whom the Punjab is the only home in India, to consider themselves against their will, as part of the Section which takes in Sind, Baluchistan and the Frontier Province? In my opinion, the voluntary character of the Statement demands that the liberty of the individual Unit should be unimpaired. Any member or Section is free to join it. The freedom to opt out is an additional safeguard. It can never be a substitute for the freedom retained in para 15(5).[13]

He applied to the Cabinet Mission's statement the same rigorous test of truth which he applied to every act of his life. Did the document mean what it said? He likened the Cabinet Mission's statement to a promissory note whose worth depends entirely on its genuineness. He had said that in the Cabinet Mission's statement he saw the germs of the realisation of his ideal of "a land without sorrow and without suffering" but that was subject to the condition that it meant what it said. "If the promise inscribed on a promissory note is not honoured, it is worth nothing and fit only to be torn to pieces and thrown away."[14] Lord Pethick-Lawrence in his Press Conference on the 17th May had said that the Statement was not an award but a recommendation. Could a recommendation be regarded as obligatory on any unit or member of the proposed Constituent Assembly? "There is such a ring about the quotation," wrote Gandhiji to Lord Pethick-Lawrence. "Can those who enthusiastically welcome the Paper but are discerning enough to repudiate, for instance, grouping, honourably seek to educate the country and the Constituent Assembly against the grouping clause?"[15] Lord Pethick-Lawrence had further argued in the course of the same Press Conference that if the parties came together on the basis of their plan "it will mean that they will have accepted that basis". But even the basis

in para 15 of the State Paper was a recommendation. "I know the legal position," Gandhiji went on to add. "My question has reference to the honourableness of opposition to grouping."

Assuming that the assurance conveyed to the ear by the Statement was not intended to be broken to the heart and proceeding on the maxim that for every wrong there is a remedy in law, he suggested that the Cabinet Mission's statement must be interpreted as a whole so as to remove the inconsistencies and contradictions between its various parts and square it in its entirety with its basic provisions and the previous declarations of the Cabinet Delegation. Later, Lord Wavell in one of his letters to the Congress President maintained that the 16th May statement did *not* make *grouping* compulsory.[16] The only provision that was made was that the representatives of certain Provinces should meet in Sections so that they *could* decide whether or not they wished to form groups. The Congress contended that if the freedom that was given to the *Provinces* was real freedom and not a mere Hobson's choice, paragraph 15 (5) of the State Paper could only mean that if a *Province* did not want any group constitution to be formed, a decision in that respect contrary to the wishes of its representatives would not be forced upon it by the majority vote of the representatives of another Province or Provinces in the Section. Otherwise the freedom that was given to the Provinces had no meaning. Wrote Maulana Azad in his letter of 20th May, to Lord Pethick-Lawrence: "The basic provision (referring to para 15 of the Statement) gives full autonomy to a Province to do what it likes and subsequently there appears to be a certain compulsion in the matter which clearly infringes that autonomy. . . . It is not clear how a Province or its representatives can be compelled to do something which they do not want to do." Thus, "a Provincial Assembly may give a mandate to its representatives not to enter any Group or a particular Group or Section." The straightest course to ascertain the wishes of a Province, Gandhiji pointed out, was that the Chairman of the Constituent Assembly at its first meeting might ask the delegates of the Provinces whether they would accept the assignment given to their Province. If the representatives of a particular Province said 'No', the Province in question would be free to remain out of the Group that might be formed by the Section and there would be no further need for it to sit in the Section any longer.[17]

The Congress Working Committee's resolution of 24th May accordingly ran: "The statement of the Cabinet Delegation affirms the basic principle of Provincial autonomy and residuary powers vesting in the Provinces. It is further said that *Provinces* should be free to form Groups. Subsequently, however, it is recommended that Provincial representatives will divide up into *Sections* which 'shall proceed to settle the Provincial constitutions for the Provinces in each Section and *shall* also *decide whether any group constitution shall be set up for those Provinces*'.

There is a marked discrepancy in these two separate provisions. . . . In order to retain the recommendatory character of the Statement, and in order to make the clauses consistent with each other, the Committee read paragraph 15 to mean that, in the first instance, the respective *Provinces* shall make their choice whether or not to belong to the Section in which they are placed." (Italics mine).

The Cabinet Delegation, however, maintained that the interpretation put forward by the Congress that "the Provinces can in the first instance make the choice whether or not to belong to the Section in which they are placed" did not accord with the Delegation's "intentions"; that the division into Sections and Groups was required by considerations that were "well known", obviously referring to the Muslim League's unbending attitude on the question, and that "this is an essential feature of the scheme" which stood as a whole.[18]

That left the parties with the issue whether in a State Paper, the "intention" of the framers thereof could have any validity. Once a decision is embodied in a legal or a political document, its "intention" must be left to be inferred from the text of the document itself according to well-established canons of jurisprudence. In the interpretation of Parliamentary Statutes even the speeches delivered in the debate by the mover during the passage of the bill cannot be cited. If, therefore, the 16th May plan of the Cabinet Mission was interpreted by the Congress in one way, by the Muslim League in another and by the Cabinet Mission in a third way, the only rational way of resolving the difference was by reference to a judicial tribunal.

"Why not interpret it only as they do? They are the best judge of what they meant," asked Norman Cliff of the *News Chronicle*, London, in an interview with Gandhiji.

"The law rightly does not accept the intention of the framer of a law outside what the text bears."

"Could not the document be re-worded in order to make the intention clear?"

"This is impossible. It would mean perpetual changing and chopping."

"Would not interpretation in spirit be better than in letter?"

"All these are questions for the court to decide."

"Is not self-denial one of your fundamental beliefs?"

Gandhiji roaring with laughter: "Satan can also quote the scripture!"

5

The Working Committee's resolution of the 24th May did not give any final opinion on the Cabinet Mission's plan of the 16th May. They felt they could not do so till they had a full picture of the connected

problems involved in the setting up of a Provisional National Government and a Constituent Assembly, as the two needed to be viewed together. While the controversy about grouping was in progress, they busied themselves with a close examination of those questions ("internal tests"). The first one referred to the withdrawal of British troops. "Whilst I appreciate your and Sir Stafford's frankness," wrote Gandhiji to Lord Pethick-Lawrence on the 20th May, summing up his impression of his conversation with the Cabinet Delegation on 18th and 19th May, "I would put on record my conviction that independence would in fact be a farce if the British troops are in India even for peace and order within or danger from without. The condition of India after the labours of the Constituent Assembly are over will in this respect be no better than now. If the position about troops persists 'independence next month' is either insincere or a thoughtless cry. Acceptance of 'Quit India' by the British is unconditional, whether or not the Constituent Assembly succeeds in bringing out a constitution. A drastic revision of the attitude is a necessity in every case. . . . Finally, it can *in no way be contended that in the face of the troops there would be natural behaviour in the Constituent Assembly*." (Italics mine).

The other question related to Paramountcy. There were over six hundred Princely States, covering an area of 712 thousand square miles or nearly one-third of the total area and with nearly a quarter of the total population of India, over which the British power claimed and exercised Paramountcy. They were largely a British creation. "Some of them were rescued, others were created by the British."[19] During the Sepoy rising of 1857, they had served, to use Lord Canning's expression, as a "break-water to the storm that would otherwise have swept over us in one great wave. And in quiet times they have uses."[20] In the reforms act of 1935, as was pointed out by Mr. Wedgwood Benn before the Joint Select Committee of the House of Commons, they had been brought into the Federation to "make the Centre Conservative and pro-English".[21] These States were regarded as their close preserves by the Political Department of the Government of India, whose consistent policy it was to let them grow up into docile puppets of British imperialism, proud of their role—"without political power, but as Royal instruments", as Sir John Malcolm put it.[22] The British Government's policy vis-a-vis the relationship of Princely India and their subjects was summed up in Lord Elgin's pregnant remark in 1862: "Scindia and Holkar are faithful to us in proportion as they are weak and conscious that they require our aid and support against their own subjects and neighbours."[23] Accordingly, the Political Department had discouraged popular movements within the Indian States territory and frowned upon their cultivating contacts with nationalist India.

Although in law the relations of the Indian States were with the Crown, the British constitution and its Indian auxiliary were so built

that the *theory* of Crown relations had no other way of expressing itself than in the *practice* of Government of India relations. The British Government had claimed as one of its suzerain attributes the unfettered right to interpret suzerainty and determine the range of its activities. It had never held itself as being under any obligation to consult the States about any arrangement concerning their future. It did not consult them when it made its first declaration of Paramountcy in 1860 or on taking over the governance of India from the hands of John Company. It did not consult them when by the Royal Titles Acts of 1876, Her Britannic Majesty was declared the Empress of India, and again when the interpretation act of 1889 was passed providing a statutory basis for suzerainty.

The choice before the Princes, Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India, declared in the course of the Government of India Bill (1935) debate in the House of Commons, was that they must either continue in a state of vassalage under the Paramountcy of the Crown, or come into the Federation. The more they had of Federation and representative Government in the States, the less would they come under the Paramountcy of the Crown. There was no other way of escape from the ceaseless operation of Paramountcy which refused to be defined and whose scope was, therefore, infinite.

In the natural course of events, therefore, on the transference of power, the successor Government or Governments should have inherited and exercised all the prerogatives and functions, including Paramountcy, which the Crown Representative exercised under his own rights or under the delegated authority of the Crown. But under their 16th May plan, the Cabinet Mission declared that Paramountcy would "lapse" on the transfer of power into Indian hands. It would neither be retained by the British Crown nor transferred to the successor Government. The consequence of it would be to leave India, as a legacy, the problem of settling with six hundred and odd Princes trained up in the tradition of British imperialism and each one of them claiming to be "independent". With six hundred and odd of these pockets of imperialist irredentism, officially divided into Hindu and Muslim, implanted in India's body politic, the problem of achieving the political consolidation of India would well-nigh become insoluble and force India to seek British aid in order to tackle it and thereby prolong its dependence upon the British even after the British power was withdrawn. Gandhiji suggested to the members of the Cabinet Delegation that if Paramountcy had to cease, it should cease even while the Constituent Assembly was engaged in hammering out a constitution and independence was at work "in fact though not in law":

Sir Stafford saw danger in acting upon my suggestion. I held the opposite view. Acceptance of my proposal would vivify the people of the States as if by a stroke of the pen. And the Interim Government would be a boon to the

Princes who, though the creation of the Paramount Power and dependent upon it for the continuance of their existence, still chafed under its heavy hand. The immediate end of Paramountcy would test the sincerity of the Princes and the Paramount Power.[24]

But if that Indian feeling did not find an echo in their hearts, Gandhiji went on to suggest, he personally would be satisfied with "Sir Stafford's view" that Paramountcy, "which had been admittedly used to protect the Princes against their people in the shape of suppressing their liberty and progress, should for the time continue for the protection and progress of the people." If the people of the States were backward, it was not because they were different in kind from the people in other parts of India directly under British rule but because they had been groaning under a double yoke. "I endorsed also the suggestion that Paramountcy should be exercised in consultation with the National Government."

Thirdly, the Congress contended that if the Constituent Assembly was not to be composed of disparate elements, the States representatives, who came into the Constituent Assembly must do so more or less in the same way as the representatives of the Provinces, and to that end the Indian people must have freedom to induce the Princes to bring the political conditions in the States into line with those prevailing in British India.

Fourthly, there was the question of the European vote. According to Mr. Attlee's declaration, the constitution of India was to be decided by Indians. The Europeans, therefore, could have no right to stand for election to the Constituent Assembly or to vote. The statement of 16th May provided for the election of one member to the Constituent Assembly to represent one million of the population. On that basis, too, the Europeans were not entitled to come into the Constituent Assembly. But 21,000 Europeans in Bengal and Assam, by virtue of the weightage given to them in these two Provinces under the Government of India Act of 1935, got a quantum of representation equivalent to 6 millions of population. They could return to the Constituent Assembly 6 members out of the total of 34 general seats allotted to Bengal and Assam. In Section C, this would put the balance of power virtually in their hands and make them arbiters in deciding the vital issue whether or not a Group should be formed in north-east India.

Finally, there was the question of the powers of the National Government at the Centre, and of the Constituent Assembly. If the Constituent Assembly was to function as a sovereign body which could decide as it chose in regard to any matter before it and give effect to its decisions, it must be called by a Provisional National Government in the true sense of the term. This was of course subject to the limitation which the Congress had voluntarily accepted, namely, that in regard to certain major

communal issues the decision should be by a majority of the two major communities. "The more I think and observe," wrote Gandhiji to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, "the more certain is my feeling that a proper National Government *responsible in fact if not in law* to the elected members of the Central Legislative Assembly, should precede the summons for the election of members of the Constituent Assembly. Only then, and not before, can a true picture of coming events be presented."[25] (Italics mine).

The reply of the Cabinet Mission to the first point, namely, withdrawal of the British troops, was an emphatic "No". Whilst there was "no intention of retaining British troops in India against the wishes of an independent India under the new constitution . . . during the interim period . . . the British Parliament has (had) . . . the ultimate responsibility for the security of India and it is (was) necessary, therefore, that British troops should remain."[26] This was, however, cushioned by the assurance that H.M.G. were "most anxious to secure that the interim period should be as short as possible."[27]

Equally categorical was the Cabinet Mission's reply in regard to the question of the exercise of Paramountcy. It would continue to be exercised by the Crown Representative pending the transfer of power and it would be exercised *not* in consultation with the National Government, though there might be consultation between the Interim Government and the States on matters of common economic interests. It was, however, added that in the interim period the Crown Representative would naturally want to help forward the movement towards democracy in the States so as to make it easier for them to come into the Union.

As regards the participation of the Europeans in the work of the Constituent Assembly, again they could give no assurance beyond saying that they would use their influence to persuade the Europeans not to exercise the right that had been conceded to them under the 16th May plan. But essentially it was a matter for the Europeans to decide.

In regard to the powers of the Constituent Assembly, the Cabinet Delegation stated that once the Constituent Assembly was formed and began working, there was no intention of "interfering with its discretion or questioning its decisions."[28]

Lastly, while the Cabinet Mission were not prepared to accept the proposition of having an Interim Government legally responsible to the Central Legislature, they gave the assurance that "His Majesty's Government would recognise the effect of . . . changes" that were contemplated to be introduced at the Centre and would "attach the fullest weight to them, and will give to the Indian Government the greatest possible freedom in the exercise of the day-to-day administration of India."[29]

* * *

As these and some other related matters discussed by Gandhiji with the Cabinet Delegation on the 18th and 19th May were of vital

importance, Gandhiji reduced to writing the gist of his conversation with them and sent it to Lord Pethick-Lawrence for verification. Lord Pethick-Lawrence wrote back to say that some of the paragraphs of his letter did not accord with their (Cabinet Mission's) recollections. He enclosed a note setting out the points on which they differed, categorically denying that Sir Stafford had ever "admitted" that Paramountcy had in the past been used to protect the Princes against their people in the shape of suppressing their liberty and progress: "You are misinterpreting what Sir Stafford said. He stated that he knew the view was held that in the past Paramountcy had been used in certain cases to support the Princes against their people. . . . "[30]

There were other points, too, on which their recollection differed. Lord Pethick-Lawrence's letter concluded: "The delegation wish me in particular to make it plain that independence must follow and not precede the coming into operation of the new constitution."

Gandhiji replied on the following day: "Whilst I thank you for your prompt reply . . . you will let me say that it is unfortunate. It has the old official flavour. Has the cry 'independence in fact' no foundation? I adhere to all that I have said in my letter. . . . Your letter is in the best imperialistic style which I thought had gone for ever. This is from an old friend."

It, however, proved to be only a "growl and counter-growl". They understood each other too well. An exchange of "love notes" followed and the whole matter blew over!

Gandhiji to Lord Pethick-Lawrence 24th May, 1946

Dear Lord:...Hoping you are not finding your labours too exacting. Yours sincerely, M. K. Gandhi.

Lord Pethick-Lawrence to Gandhiji 25th May, 1946

My dear Gandhiji:...I have come out here for the express purpose of launching India on its passage to sovereignty and independence and I greatly need your cooperation. Sincerely Yours, Pethick-Lawrence.

Gandhiji to Lord Pethick-Lawrence 27th May, 1946

Dear Lord:...I hope everything will go well with the Mission. Yours sincerely, M. K. Gandhi.

6

On the 28th May, members of the Congress Working Committee dispersed and Gandhiji with some of them left for Mussoorie for a short respite. There was nothing more for them to do in Delhi till the decision of the Muslim League on the 16th May plan was known. And the Council of the Muslim League could not meet before 6th June, as Jinnah wanted his usual fortnight's notice for the summoning of that body.

Mussoorie, the Queen of the hill stations in northern India, with its cool, pine-scented breezes, shady walks and thickly wooded crags and hill-sides, afforded some welcome relief to the Mahatma after the broiling heat and dust-storms of Delhi. But he felt ill at ease amidst the whirl of gaiety that is Mussoorie with its fashionable set all out for fun while the poor coolie in his dirty rags is bent double under the pyramids of heavy baggages of the pleasure-seekers, which he carries on his back, up the steep gradients to luxury hotels, and the rickshaw-puller pants for breath as he works himself to an early grave for their sake by contracting heart and lung diseases. He rattled the skeletons in the cupboards of the rich fashionable folk, who congregated at his prayer meetings, by reminding them of these facts. Not satisfied with it, he sent two members of his party to visit the filthy, ill-lighted, ill-ventilated, smoky hovels of the poor, crawling with vermin, and published their report in *Harijan*. He pleaded with the moneyed folk to build a *Dharmashala* or *Musafirkhana* (free travellers' inn) where the poor could stay and have the benefit of the cool hill climate: "It is a sad commentary that in this poor country where according to books poverty carries with it a certain dignity, in public places the poor are treated almost with contempt and they are made to pay for receiving it."[31]

"What would you do if you were made a dictator of India for one day?" a foreign Press correspondent asked Gandhiji during his stay at Mussoorie.

"I would not accept it in the first place," replied Gandhiji. "But if I did become a dictator for one day, I would spend it in cleaning the stables of the Viceroy's House that the hovels of the Harijans in Delhi are."[32]

"Suppose they continued your dictatorship for the second day?"

"The second day would be a prolongation of the first."

"You have brought us to the threshold of independence," remarked another friend. "You will of course give entire credit for it to Ahimsa. But we feel that we have derived more strength from truth than from your Ahimsa."

"You are wrong in thinking . . . that the country has derived more strength from truth than from Ahimsa," replied Gandhiji. "On the contrary, I am firmly convinced that whatever progress the country has made, is due to its adoption of Ahimsa as its method of struggle."[33]

"I mean the country has not understood your Ahimsa but it has understood truth and that has filled it with strength," rejoined the friend.

"It is just the contrary," replied Gandhiji. "There is so much of untruth in the country. I feel suffocated sometimes. I am convinced, therefore, that it must be the practice of Ahimsa alone, however faulty, that has brought us so far. Moreover, I have not given truth the second place. . . ."

"Nevertheless, your emphasis is always on Ahimsa. You have made propagation of non-violence the mission of your life."

"There again you are wrong. Ahimsa is not the goal. Truth is the goal. But we have no means of realising truth in human relationship except through the practice of Ahimsa. . . . Ahimsa being the means we are naturally more concerned with it in our everyday life. It is Ahimsa, therefore, that our masses have to be educated in. Education in truth follows from it as a natural end."

On the 7th June, Gandhiji returned to Delhi after a drive of about 175 miles at mid-night. At the Jumna bridge his car was stopped by the sentry on duty. "Who is in the car?" the sentry enquired thrusting his head into the car window. "It's the King of the poor of India," replied the Sikh driver! "Pass on," said the sentry with a reverent bow.

* * *

When the Working Committee met on the 8th June, it was learnt that Sir Stafford Cripps had seen Jinnah and the latter was agreeable to the formation of a Coalition Interim Government consisting of the fittest persons without any reference to parity. In an interview with Gandhiji on the 11th June, the Viceroy suggested that the Congress and the Muslim League should meet to fix up names jointly for a Coalition Government at the Centre on that basis. Gandhiji welcomed the Viceroy's proposal. He suggested that they should be men of "proved ability and incorruptibility";[34] none should talk of parity; they should agree to be closeted in a room, and no-one should go out till an agreement was reached. In the absence of agreement between the parties in spite of all effort, the Viceroy should examine the merits of the respective lists of the two parties and accept either the one or the other, "not an amalgam" of the two.

But another difficulty now cropped up. Jinnah was not prepared to sit at the same table with the Congress President, who was a non-League Muslim. Hindus were "enemies" but non-League Muslims were traitors; he could not treat with "traitors" ! The Congress on its part was not prepared to have any negotiations with Jinnah on these terms. The Viceroy suggested as a way out that the Maulana Saheb, the Congress President, should be represented at the proposed conference by Pandit Nehru. Gandhiji advised the Congress to agree to this for the sake of a settlement provided it was made clear that Pandit Nehru went there only as the Maulana Saheb's mouthpiece.

On the 12th June at noon, Pandit Nehru went to the Viceroy for the proposed conference. But Jinnah did not turn up. Pandit Nehru showed to the Viceroy the Congress list of proposed names for the Interim Government. But in the talk that ensued, to Pandit Nehru's surprise the Viceroy again in effect harked back to parity. In a letter to Lord Wavell next day, Gandhiji wrote: "You are a very great soldier—a daring soldier. Dare to do the right. You must make your choice of one

horse or the other. So far as I can see, you will never succeed in riding two at the same time. Choose the names submitted either by the Congress or the League. For God's sake do not make an incompatible mixture and in trying to do so produce a fearful explosion."

But Lord Wavell was not made of that stuff. In their first meeting at Simla in 1945, Gandhiji had confided to him his fond hope that he would meet in the soldier-Viceroy Wordsworth's "Happy Warrior":

> 'Tis he whose law is reason; who depends
> Upon that law as on the best of friends;
> Whence, in a state where men are tempted still
> To evil for a guard against worse ill,
> And what in quality or act is best
> Doth seldom on a right foundation rest,
> He labours good on good to fix, and owes
> To virtue every triumph that he knows.

At the end of their meeting Lord Wavell presented to Gandhiji a copy of *Other Men's Flowers*—an anthology of poetry compiled by himself. Gandhiji eagerly thumbed through its pages on his return to his residence looking for his favourite. Lo, and behold! (was it mere coincidence?) "Character of the Happy Warrior" was not in it!

In the course of a very personal letter Gandhiji wrote to Sir Stafford Cripps:

> You are handling the most difficult task of your life. As I see it, the Mission is playing with fire. If you have courage you will do what I suggested from the very beginning...you will not be able to have your cake and eat it. You will have to choose between the two—the Muslim League and the Congress, both your creations....Coquetting now with the Congress, now with the League and again with the Congress, wearing yourself away, will not do. Either you swear by what is right or by what the exigencies of British policy may dictate. In either case bravery is required. Only stick to the programme. Stick to your dates even though heavens may fall. Leave by the 16th (June) whether you allow the Congress to form a coalition or the League. If you think that the accumulated British wisdom must know better than these two creations of yours I have nothing to add. But I have fancied that you are not cast in that mould.[35]

The letter ended with the advice: "Bury yourselves in private life, unless the brave British announcement made is fulfilled to the Indian hope. A word to the wise."

Sir Stafford replied: "I can assure you, neither I nor my colleagues lack courage to act but *we want to temper that courage with prudence*."[36] (Italics mine). Referring to the advice that Gandhiji had given him on various occasions, viz., "to show infinite patience in dealing with these difficult matters", Sir Stafford proceeded: "Certainly I shall never put

my desire to return home and rest before my determination to leave nothing undone which may help a solution of the difficult problems here. . . . I shall have great hope that before we leave India, we may have helped towards a settlement of the problem."

Gandhiji's mind was full of dark forebodings. Things seemed to be going awry. Was it the secret force of the Civil Service working as before to sabotage the intentions of the Cabinet Delegation? At the 1945 Simla Conference the Viceroy had admitted that the Congress had acted on the square. All the minorities were then in tune with the Congress. Gandhiji had advised giving it to the Congress if the League was not willing to shoulder the burden. But it was not done and the conference was allowed to fizzle out. And now again they were uselessly prolonging the agony by trying to bring the League and the Congress together. It was beyond them.

The Indian National Army had discovered for themselves that brought face to face with the realities, under conditions of independence, they thought and acted altogether differently from the way which they had been taught was inherent in Indian character. The communal problem was completely liquidated in the Indian National Army ranks. The vain labours of the Cabinet Mission had proved its converse. Had not he often written that true Hindu-Muslim unity could not be expected while the third party was there? "The slaves and their masters are both in an unnatural state," he remarked in one of his prayer discourses. "They cannot think and act naturally."[37] In the course of a talk with a friend, he remarked: "A nameless fear has seized me. . . . As a result I feel paralysed. But I will not corrupt your mind by communicating my unsupported suspicion to you."[38] He likened the Cabinet Mission to a mother who sees that her child is dying. "Still she does not give up hope. She keeps on trying the prescriptions of doctors, physicians and quacks—now of the one, then of the other, then of a third till the last moment."[39] Similarly, the Mission did not wish to give up hope.

The statement of the President of the European Association on the 13th June was the first warning of the rocks ahead. The Europeans believed, the statement said, that they had "obligations and contributions to make in constitution-making" and that they were going to exercise their right.[40] But if the Congress and the League made a joint appeal to them, they might agree to a reduction in their quota!

"No less a person than the President of the European Association has exhibited the lion's paw," commented Gandhiji in *Harijan*.[41] "Let it be understood," he remarked at the prayer gathering on the 14th June, "there is no question of going to them with the beggar's bowl." Nor was the past record of the Europeans such as to inspire confidence. They had all along used their vote to uphold the British power and acted as a wedge between the Hindus and the Muslims. Apart from the question of legalities, decency and good grace required that they should abstain

from interference in the affairs of the people of India either by voting for the selection of candidates for the Constituent Assembly or by standing as candidates. Referring to the Cabinet Mission's plea that they had no control over the Europeans, Gandhiji wrote:

The British power in India has four arms—the official military, the official civil, the unofficial civil and the unofficial military. So, when the ruling class speaks of the unofficial Europeans as not being under their control, it is nonsense. The official exists for the non-official. The former would have no work if the latter did not exist. The British flag came in the wake of British commerce. The whole of India is an occupied country....It is the straw which shows the way the wind is blowing....The unreasonable performance of the European Association...is the greatest disturbing factor to shake the faith in the reality of the Mission's work....Will the gun-protected Europeans of India silence their guns and stake their fortunes...purely on the goodwill of the masses of India?...They have been made to look so foolish in their latest statement as to say that they would refrain from voting for themselves but would use their votes for electing their henchmen wearing the Indian skin. They would, if they could, repeat the trick, which has enabled them, a handful, to strangle the dumb millions of India. How long will this agony last![42]

According to his wont he did not allow the grass to grow under his feet. He began to collect and publish legal opinions on the constitutional impropriety of the European participation in the work of constitution-making. The first was from Shiva Narayan, Advocate of Delhi, who till then was comparatively unknown in high legal circles. "Who is this Shiva Narayan? Never heard of him!" remarked the sophisticated politicians in the Capital to each other raising their brows! Gandhiji had a quiet laugh. What did it matter who he was? It was his legal opinion that mattered and the fact that it was the first in the field. In quick succession followed legal opinions of D. N. Bahadurji, Sir Alladi Krishnaswamy, K. M. Munshi and Bakshi Tekchand—all of them legal luminaries of the first order. That effectively scotched the European Association's arrogant claim, but there was no formal retraction nor was there any definite assurance from the Cabinet Delegation beyond what they had already given. "We cannot depend upon grace or goodwill where rights are concerned," wrote the Congress President finally to the Viceroy on 14th June, and there the matter was left to rest.

Remained the difficulty about parity. The Muslims constituted a little over one-fourth of the entire population of India. According to the democratic principle, they could claim less than one-third of the total representation. But the Muslim League argued that the Muslims were not a minority but a "nation" and as such must have a parity of representation with the majority community, irrespective of their numerical strength in any Government that might be formed. The Muslim League's demand for parity was a natural corollary to what was known as the

"two-nation theory" of the League, which the Congress had repudiated *in toto*. Constitutionally it was a device to rationalise the irrational demand of a minority to be put on a par with the majority in a democratic set-up. In the 1945 Simla formula parity had been introduced between "caste Hindus and Muslims". Now it was between the Muslim League and the Congress. There was, however, this important difference that whereas previously the Muslim quota of 5 was to include one non-League Muslim, now all the Muslims were to be members of the Muslim League. Further, since as a nationalist organisation, the Congress was in honour bound to reserve one seat out of its quota of 6 for a nationalist Muslim and another for a Scheduled Caste representative, this would have reduced the community that constituted the majority in the country to a minority of 4 in an Interim Government of 13 members! "We are unable to agree to this proposal," wrote the Congress President to the Viceroy on the 14th June. "If the position about the European vote and 'parity' remains, my Committee are reluctantly compelled to inform you that they will not be able to assist you in the difficult task ahead."

7

The Congress President's letter of 14th June to the Viceroy marked the close of the Cabinet Mission's negotiations for the formation of an Interim Government. For some time past Gandhiji had again been seized by a restlessness. Looking over the pages of my diary of those fateful days, I find the following under the date 15th June:

> Again, Bapu is in the grip of his "instinct"! For the last three days he has been feeling that things are going wrong. Everybody, including the Viceroy, seems to be afraid of Jinnah and vainly trying to please him at any price. They admit that his position is untenable yet the blame is laid at the door of the Congress! Cripps seems to be isolated from his colleagues.

The reference was to Gandhiji's uncanny intuition which often gave him a premonition of things to come contrary to all outward indications.

On the 16th June, the Viceroy and the Cabinet Mission issued a statement abandoning further negotiations and setting forth their own proposal for the formation of an Interim Government. Accordingly, invitations were issued to fourteen persons of whom six were Hindu members of the Congress (one being a member of the Scheduled Caste), five Muslims of the Muslim League and three representatives of the minority communities, viz., one Sikh, one Indian Christian and one Parsi.

Lord Wavell sent an advance copy of the statement to Gandhiji. In the list of names all the five Muslim names were identical with the list furnished by the League, but in the names furnished by the Congress changes had been made without consultation with the Congress. The

name of Sarat Chandra Bose was removed and that of Harekrushna Mahtab, who was under Congress discipline, substituted in its place. The Congress had included the name of a woman member of the Congress in its list, who was also an Indian Christian (Rajkumari Amrit Kaur) but her name was not there. Dr. Zakir Husain, whom the Congress wanted to include as its nominee in the Government as a nationalist Muslim, was not taken. The Congress had objected to the inclusion of Abdur Rab Nishtar in the League's list of five, from the very beginning, as he had been defeated in the 1946 election. But the objection was overruled by the Viceroy. The original figure of 13 had been raised to 14 on the insistence by the Congress but the 14th name in the Viceroy's list was a Government official N. P. Engineer, the Advocate General, who had figured as the Prosecution Counsel in the Indian National Army trials. It, too, had been included without any consultation with the Congress.

In his after-prayer address on the 16th June Gandhiji pleaded for patience. There were, he remarked, two ways of looking at a picture. They could look at the bright side or at the dark. Personally, he believed in looking at the bright side. Thus regarded, what appeared to be blemishes in the Viceregal announcement would be seen to be really its beauty. "You should bear with the Mission, too. They have inherited the tradition of imperialism which they cannot outgrow all at once. . . . We must not blame them for not throwing it overboard overnight. Let us trust their *bona fides*. Let us not act upon mere suspicion."

At night he woke up at half past one and dictated for the Working Committee the draft of a letter to the Viceroy. He particularly emphasised in it four points: (1) The League being avowedly a Muslim organisation could not include any non-Muslim representative in its list; (2) the Congress as a nationalist organisation must have the right to include a Congress Muslim in its list; (3) the League could not have any say in the selection of any names outside those belonging to its quota of five Muslims. This would mean that, in the event of a vacancy occurring among the seats allotted to the minorities, the Congress alone would have the right to select names to fill up the vacancies as it claimed to represent all sections by right of service; and (4) in action, the Interim Government should be regarded as being responsible to the elected representatives in the Assembly.

The Working Committee, however, in its afternoon session next day, put Gandhiji's draft practically into cold storage. They were not enamoured of the Viceroy's proposal but they did not want to say "No" to it. The difficulty created by the substitution of Harekrushna Mahtab's name for that of Sarat Bose could be remedied without difficulty as Mahtab was a Congressman and would abide by the Congress advice. The non-inclusion of a nationalist Muslim could similarly be rectified by putting a nationalist Muslim in the place of one Hindu member on the

Congress list, although it would reduce the majority community to a minority in the Interim Government. The difficulty about the European vote was partially overcome when the European Association announced that it would refrain from participating in the elections to the Constituent Assembly. As regards the power of the Interim Government, although Lord Wavell in his letter of the 30th May to the Congress President had denied that he had at any time stated in the course of negotiations that the Interim Government would have the same powers as a Dominion Cabinet, he had gone on to assure him in the course of the same letter that "His Majesty's Government would treat the new Interim Government with the same close consultation and consideration as a Dominion Government":

> Most liberal intentions may be almost unrecognisable when they have to be expressed in a formal document. I have no doubt that if you are prepared to trust me, we shall be able to cooperate in a manner which will give India a sense of freedom from external control and will prepare (her) for complete freedom as soon as the new constitution is made.

In view of the friendly tone of the Viceroy's appeal and the impending crises—food crisis and a railway strike in the offing—with which the country was faced, the Working Committee did not deem it fit to stretch the remaining issues to the breaking point. A tentative decision accepting the scheme of the Interim Government, as it then emerged, was accordingly taken in the Working Committee meeting on the 18th June and a draft resolution was framed to that effect. But it was not communicated to the Viceroy as the Working Committee wanted to consult Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan—who was expected to arrive the next day—particularly in regard to the inclusion of Abdur Rab Nishtar's name in the Muslim League list. But the next day Pandit Nehru left for Kashmir, where the trial of Sheikh Abdullah was pending. Sheikh Abdullah was President of the Kashmir National Conference—a nationalist organisation affiliated to the All-India States Peoples' Conference of which Pandit Nehru was the President. Some members of the Working Committee also left Delhi the same day, as they felt that their work in Delhi was as good as over. But then a sudden dramatic development took place. *The Statesman* published the substance of a letter written by Jinnah to Lord Wavell in which he had asked for a number of assurances in regard to the Interim Government some of which were wholly new and to which the Congress could never agree. The Congress President thereupon wrote to the Viceroy to ask for the text of Jinnah's letter and the Viceroy's reply. Among the assurances given by the Viceroy to Jinnah, in his letter of 20th June, 1946, one was to the effect that no change in the *principle* would be made in the list of names without the consent of the two major parties. This meant that the Congress could not nominate a nationalist Muslim even within its quota without the consent of the League.

The other assurance given by the Viceroy to Jinnah was that if any vacancy occurred among the minority seats (including the Scheduled Castes) both the major parties would be consulted before filling the vacancy. This gave to the Muslim League virtual power of veto in the selection of the representative of even the Scheduled Castes, who were an integral part of Hindu society and were treated as such by the Viceroy and further linked by him with the Congress when in his letter of 15th June to the Congress President he had denied that there was either League-Congress parity or parity between the Hindus and Muslims in the basis of the Interim Government proposed by the Cabinet Delegation and himself, as there would be in it six Congressmen (including one Scheduled Caste) to five representatives of the Muslim League and six Hindus (five caste Hindus plus one Scheduled Caste) as against five Muslims. But now parity was again being brought back by the back door after it had categorically been repudiated in theory. Under Wavell-Jinnah understanding, it seemed, the Scheduled Caste representative was considered as falling outside either the Hindu quota or the Congress quota. How could otherwise the Muslim League have a say in his selection? The effect of this would be to establish parity not only between the Congress and the League but also between caste Hindus and Muslims, giving to the Congress the status of not even a Hindu organisation but a "caste Hindu" organisation!

The feeling thereupon grew in the Working Committee that the Viceroy was acting in a partisan manner if not actually in alliance with the League. This feeling was further strengthened when on the 22nd June, the Viceroy in a letter to the Congress President asked the Congress not to press their demand for the inclusion of a Muslim of their choice among the representatives of the Congress: "For reasons of which you are well aware it is not possible for the Cabinet Mission or myself to accept this request." This was in glaring contrast with the reply which he had given to the Congress President on the 15th June when the Congress had taken exception to a League nominee for the Interim Government: "I cannot accept the right of the Congress to object to names put forward by the Muslim League, any more than I would accept similar objections from the other side."

Gandhiji did not think in terms of the balance of power. With him it was a fundamental issue. Congress had always claimed to be a national organisation. It could not barter for any tactical reasons its right and duty to represent all communities and classes, without committing political suicide. Similarly, it could not let down for political gain its tried and faithful friends. Such opportunism would sap its moral being and inevitably prove fatal. To gain the world at the cost of one's soul was a bad bargain. But the Working Committee had its own difficulties. To quote from my diary again:

New Delhi, 19th June, 1946

In order to include a nationalist Muslim in the Cabinet it would be necessary for the Congress to drop a Hindu name. If an outstanding figure like Maulana Saheb for instance is put there, nobody would object even though it would reduce the Hindu quota. But the Maulana feels a delicacy about it and has absolutely refused in spite of Bapu's personal pleading.

Bapu gave a final notice to the Working Committee today that if they agreed to the non-inclusion of a nationalist Muslim and the inclusion of the name of N. P. Engineer, which the Viceroy had foisted upon them, he would have nothing to do with the whole business and leave Delhi.

8

During the week following upon the publication of the Viceregal statement of 16th June, the capital was turned into a seething cauldron of speculations and rumours. Anxiety rose to fever pitch towards the close and hopes and fears alternated in quick succession. The following entries from my diary will tell the rest of the story:

New Delhi, 20th June, 1946

Bapu again reiterated his stand in the Working Committee in regard to the inclusion of a nationalist Muslim. The Sardar strongly supported him and told the members that they dared not make terms with the Cabinet Mission by repudiating Bapu. In the end it was decided to send Bapu's draft letter to the Cabinet Mission. In the meantime news came that the Kashmir Government had arrested Pandit Nehru. Wires were sent to the absent members—Shankarrao Deo, Govind Ballabh Pant and Narendra Dev—to call them back.

Between 1.30 and 2.45 p.m. Cripps came and saw Bapu. Bapu again urged upon him that the Cabinet Mission must choose between the one or the other party, not attempt an amalgam; the Cabinet Mission were pursuing a wrong course. Cripps was apologetic. It would be difficult to begin anew after having come so far; Jinnah would not listen, and so on. In the end Bapu told him that in that case the Cabinet Mission could go the way they liked; he would have nothing to do with it.

New Delhi, 21st June, 1946

Bapu's draft was again discussed in the Working Committee. Bapu warned the members that they would not gain anything by entering on their new venture on bended knee. He reiterated his opinion that if the Cabinet Mission did not accept their conditions, it would be better to let the Muslim League form a National Government at the Centre during the interim period.

The Maulana Saheb sent a wire to the Kashmir Government that Jawaharlal's presence was badly needed in the deliberations of the Working Committee. He also sent a message to the Viceroy requesting him to make arrangements for suitable transport to enable him to return to Delhi. The Viceroy has accordingly sent necessary instructions to the Resident. Later, news came that Kashmir Darbar had provided plane and motor transport for Jawaharlal's return.

In the evening Bapu told the Sardar that negotiations for the inclusion of a nationalist Muslim in the Cabinet should be conducted not by the Maulana Saheb but someone else as the Maulana Saheb being himself a nationalist Muslim might feel it embarrassing to carry the insistence to its logical end.

New Delhi, 22nd June, 1946

Sudhir Ghosh saw Cripps. He reported that Cripps had told him that the Congress stand in regard to the inclusion of a nationalist Muslim was absolutely logical and legitimate but could not the Working Committee waive it? They had proceeded on a written assurance which they had received from the Maulana Saheb that the Working Committee would not stick out on that point. And now they felt themselves placed in an awkward position. On Sudhir asking why they could not entrust the power to the League if the Congress declined to accept it on the Cabinet Mission's terms, Cripps replied that they did not feel that the League by itself could be entrusted with it.

"Then why not entrust it to the Congress?"

"For that we shall need the authority of H.M.G."

"Could not that be done from here?"

"No, that would require personal discussion."

At noon, a letter was received from the Viceroy asking the Congress President not to press the demand about the inclusion of a Muslim of their choice among the representatives of the Congress in the Interim Government. It achieved what Bapu's persuasion had failed to do so far. On the question being put to the vote in the Working Committee all except one were opposed to the acceptance of power on those terms.

New Delhi, 23rd June, 1946

In the Working Committee meeting in the afternoon Bapu put forth his emphatic view that the Congress should keep out of the Interim Government but go into the Constituent Assembly as it was purely an elective body whose representative character was admitted even by the British Government. The Viceroy could not interfere with its working —he could not even sit in it as a matter of right. If the worst came to the worst, it could be turned into a rebel body. . . . In the alternative, he saw no possibility of giving a fight, as the requisite atmosphere of non-violence was not forthcoming. Personally, he could not even think of launching civil disobedience, etc.

While he was proceeding in this strain, Rajendra Babu read out a telegram which he had received from Assam, drawing attention to the form which the Viceroy's Reforms Office had issued to the Speakers of the various Provincial Assemblies for the election of members to the Constituent Assembly. Among other things it required the candidates to declare that they would be "willing to serve as representatives of the Province for purposes of paragraph 19 of the statement" of 16th May of the Cabinet Mission. Para 19 contained the disputed clauses relating to the formation of groups. The Sardar also had received a similar message from B. G. Kher, the Chief Minister of Bombay: If the Congress candidates signed the declaration would it not commit them to the principle of grouping and voting in the Section, as laid down in para 19? On reading the text Bapu exclaimed: "Even the Constituent Assembly plan now stinks. I am afraid, we cannot touch it."

Referring to the new hitch in the course of the prayer discourse in the evening Bapu remarked: "A single drop of poison can convert a pot of nectar into a fatal draught. It grieves me to see that the Constituent Assembly is being killed by the underlings of the very people who had given it birth." He exculpated the authors of the State Paper unless it was found later that they had known that such instructions were issued. He still clung to the hope that it was only an error and would soon be rectified.

In the evening Rajkumari Amrit Kaur went to see Abell, the Private Secretary to the Viceroy. Abell said that Jinnah was very obstinate. But what could they do! They had to take him along. He showed her the letter received from the Congress which apparently seemed to have been written without the knowledge of the Working Committee. It was only on receiving that letter that they had conceded Jinnah's demands for the sake of a settlement. How could they be blamed for it? He hoped that the Congress would not carry its insistence to the breaking point.

New Delhi, 24th June, 1946

Fates seem to have been furiously at work yesterday. In the morning while returning to Birla House from the silent prayer meeting, after dropping Bapu at Bhangi Colony, the Sardar's car crossed that of Lord Pethick-Lawrence coming from the opposite direction. Lord Pethick-Lawrence had gone straight from the silent prayer to Birla House to meet the Sardar but did not find him there. He recognised the Sardar's car, took the Sardar into his own and whisked him away to his residence, where they had half an hour's talk.

At noon Lord Pethick-Lawrence and Mr. A. V. Alexander joined the Sardar at lunch at Birla House. Rajaji also was present. In the afternoon the Sardar, the Maulana, Pandit Nehru and Rajendra Babu had a meeting with the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy.

In the morning today, when Sudhir came to see Bapu, he said that

last night he had seen Cripps. The latter had told him that they had decided that if the Congress accepted the long term plan and rejected the short term proposal, all that the Cabinet Mission had done under the 16th June declaration for the formation of an Interim Government would be scrapped and a *de novo* attempt made for the same. They invited Bapu and Sardar to meet them. They seem to have made up their mind to clear up the mess created by the assurances given to Jinnah by Lord Wavell.

At seven a.m. Bapu accompanied by Sardar and Sudhir went to meet the Cabinet Mission. Today being his day of silence conversation on his part was carried on by scribbling short slips, which read as follows:

I understood that you proposed to scrap the whole plan of Interim Government as it had gone up to now and consider the situation *de novo*.

Then if you say that you will form a Government out of the acceptances it won't work as far as I can see. If you are not in a desperate hurry and if you would discuss the thing with me, I would gladly do so after I have opened my lips, i.e., after 8 p.m. Meanwhile you should have if you do not mind the Working Committee letter of rejection of the proposal contained in the Viceroy's letter of 22nd instant. In my opinion that letter puts a new appearance on the Interim Government. The object of the Working Committee so far as I know is to help the Mission, not to hinder it except when its project results in the Working Committee committing suicide. Sudhir's talk led me to see light through the prevailing darkness. But is there really light?

As to the Constituent Assembly, I was quite clear up to yesterday afternoon that the Congress should work the Constituent Assembly to the best of its ability. But the rules I read yesterday have revolutionised my mentality. There is a serious flaw. I accuse nobody. But a flaw is a flaw. The three parties must not work with three minds and hope for success.

Then you should not isolate a particular section from the whole. Why not say "under the State Paper as a whole"?

However I would gladly discuss this question also with you in the evening. I am sorry to cause you all this trouble. I only hope that you perceive my object in all this effort.

After the meeting, the Sardar asked to be dropped at the residence of the Maulana. On the way he asked Bapu: "There is a meeting of the Working Committee; what am I to tell them?" Bapu answered that he was not satisfied with the talk with the Cabinet Mission. The Sardar was irritated. "You raised doubts as regards para 19. They have given a clear assurance on that. What more do you want?" Bapu scribbled in reply: "During our meeting when Cripps said to me that if we were apprehensive about the wording of the instructions issued by the Reforms Office they could delete the reference to para 19 and substitute in its place the words 'for the purpose of the declaration of the 16th May', Lord Pethick-Lawrence immediately intervened and said: 'No, that presents difficulty.' " The Sardar dissented. Bapu asked Sudhir. Sudhir confirmed

Bapu's version but added that his own impression was that they were prepared to concede what Bapu had asked for.

The Maulana Saheb after hearing the report of the meeting with the Cabinet Mission took both Bapu and Sardar to the Working Committee where there was a prolonged discussion. The Sardar said that they were under a promise to give their decision to the Cabinet Mission that afternoon. Bapu dissented. In a series of scribbled slips he suggested that they should postpone their decision till he met the Cabinet Delegation in the evening and obtained further clarification from them. Finally he scribbled: "There is no question of my feelings being hurt. I am against deciding this issue today but you are free to decide as you like."

The Cabinet Mission had asked for the final decision of the Congress and the League on their proposals to be conveyed to them by 2 o'clock. At noon someone from the Viceroy's House rang up Pandit Nehru to say that the Working Committee's reply should be sent at once. Pandit Nehru rang up the Sardar who replied that he saw no reason for hurry and asked Sudhir to contact Mr. Blaker of the Cabinet Mission staff and say that such impatient insistence would needlessly spoil matters. Bapu on being informed of it drafted a short interim reply to be sent straightaway and suggested that the Cabinet Delegation should be informed that a detailed letter would follow. This was done. Afterwards it was learnt that the overzealous official, who had sent the telephone message, presumably to help the Muslim League, who were waiting for the Congress decision (See Chapter IX, Section 2), had acted without authority and was pulled up for it.

In the afternoon meeting of the Working Committee Bapu asked me to read out a note which he had written for the Working Committee. In it he pointed out that the Constituent Assembly had no *de jure* authority, as it did not bear the imprimatur of the Parliament. It was based only on a recommendation of the Cabinet Mission. "Their recommendation will remain in their mouths or on the printed paper. We shall have no authority even to order a constable if there is a row in the Constituent Assembly. This is a dangerous situation. There must be the imprimatur of the Parliament and real power in the Central Government before we can make anything of the Constituent Assembly. The imprimatur of the Parliament would clear the way for the Chairman of the Constituent Assembly (by making the issue adjudicable) in case he wants to refer a point of major importance to the Federal Court for decision."

In the course of the discussion that followed, the Sardar pressed with great vigour his view that the explanation given by the Cabinet Mission in regard to the form issued by the Reforms Office was quite adequate and the Congress could not postpone giving its decision forthwith without damaging its prestige. Bapu scribbled: "My mind is in a fog. . . . It centres round the insertion of reference to para 19 . . . and the meaning

of 'scrapping the whole plan' (of the Interim Government)." The Sardar lost patience. Bapu asked Sarat Bose and Rajendra Babu to give their legal opinion as to whether the declaration that had been issued to the Speakers of the Assemblies left the members, who might go into the Constituent Assembly after signing it, freedom of action in regard to para 19 of the 16th May plan. The opinion of Sarat Bose was that reference to para 19 in the instructions did not take away from the members liberty of action since their acceptance of the State Paper was subject to the legal interpretation of the clauses in dispute. Rajendra Babu's opinion was that para 19 did not make grouping compulsory. It only gave Provinces freedom to form groups as was clear from the language of the document itself. In regard to having the imprimatur of the Parliament on the State Paper, Pandit Nehru felt that it would be a "limiting process" and restrict the scope of interpretation. (For this the Congress had to pay a heavy price. See Chapter VI, Vol. II.)

* * *

For once fear has proved a liar. The Cabinet Mission issued an elucidation in the evening that the form which the members of the Constituent Assembly were required to sign did not bind them down to frame a constitution in terms of para 19. The pledge they had to sign required them only to cooperate in framing a new constitution for India.

* * *

At 8 p.m. when Bapu's silence ended, he and the Sardar met the Viceroy and the members of the Cabinet Mission at the Viceroy's House. On returning from there the Sardar again asked Bapu: "Were you satisfied?" Bapu replied: "On the contrary my suspicion has deepened. I suggest that hereafter you should guide the Working Committee." The Sardar replied: "Nothing of the sort. I am not going to say a word. You yourself tell them whatever you want."

* * *

At 10 p.m. Bapu wrote a letter to Cripps: "I would far rather not write this note. . . . In spite of the readiness . . . of the Working Committee to go in for the Constituent Assembly I would not be able to advise the leap in the dark. . . . There is nothing but a vacuum after you throw all the commitments on the scrap heap, if you really do intend to do so. . . . The instructions to the Governors (issued by the Reforms Office), innocuous as they have proved to be, have opened up a dreadful vista. I, therefore, propose to advise the Working Committee not to accept the long term proposition without its being connected with the Interim Government. I must not act against my instinct. . . ."

New Delhi, 25th June, 1946

At 8 a.m. Bapu went to attend the Working Committee meeting. He asked me to read out the note which he had written to Cripps last night. He then addressed them very briefly: "I admit defeat. You are

not bound to act upon my unsupported suspicion. You should follow my intuition only if it appeals to your reason. Otherwise you should take an independent course. I shall now leave with your permission. You should follow the dictates of your reason."

A hush fell over the gathering. Nobody spoke for some time. The Maulana Saheb with his unfailing alertness at once took in the situation. "What do you desire? Is there any need to detain Bapu any further?" he asked. Everybody was silent. Everybody understood. In that hour of decision they had no use for Bapu. They decided to drop the pilot. Bapu returned to his residence.

The Working Committee again met at noon and addressed a letter to the Cabinet Mission, rejecting the proposal for the formation of the Interim Government at the Centre and accepting the long term plan with its own interpretation of the disputed clauses. In spite of it they made Bapu to attend the afternoon session of the Working Committee. At noon the Cabinet Mission invited the members of the Working Committee to meet them. Bapu not being a member was not sent for and did not go. On their return nobody told Bapu a word about what had happened at the meeting!

9

The final phase of negotiations with the Cabinet Mission marked the beginning of that cleavage between Gandhiji and some of his closest colleagues which in the final phase of the transfer of power left them facing different ways. They had come very near to one another in the earlier phase of the negotiations. Practically all the important resolutions and drafts of the Working Committee were first conceived in Gandhiji's brain and subsequently adopted or adapted by the Working Committee. There never was such complete accord again. Gandhiji's attitude on the use of the British army for the maintenance of internal order; his insistence on being left alone to settle directly with the Muslim League after the British had quitted, even if it meant civil war rather than enter into a diplomatic deal with the British however favourable; his readiness to face chaos and anarchy in preference to peace imposed by British arms, not only remained unchanged, they stiffened as time went by. The members of the Working Committee with their purely political approach, felt out of their depth in these uncharted waters.

There were other points of difference, too, of a minor nature. Gandhiji was opposed to the Indian National Army personnel being pampered with money. He wanted them to convert themselves into ideal citizens and servants of the nation after the manner of Cromwell's demobilised Ironsides, about whom it was said that in a few months after their demobilisation out of fifty thousand of them there remained not a

trace indicating that the most formidable army in the world had just been absorbed into the mass of the community. "The Royalists themselves confessed that in every department of honest industry, the discarded warriors prospered beyond other men . . . none was charged with any theft or robbery . . . none was heard to ask an alms . . . (and) if a baker, a mason, or a waggoner attracted notice by his diligence and sobriety, he was in all probability one of Cromwell's old soldiers."[43]

Gandhiji was opposed to the Congress fighting the elections with funds. His advice was not followed. Later the I.N.A. question led to many complications. Some members of the I.N.A. even threatened violence. Similarly, some of the candidates, who had been nominated or supported by the Congress or helped with Congress funds, were defeated in the elections and joined the Muslim League. One of them, Mian Ghulam Sarwar, later organised the Noakhali disturbances.

Referring to an incident in the Working Committee on the last day at Delhi and a conversation he had with him in that behalf later Gandhiji wrote to Sardar Patel from Poona on the 1st July, 1946: "I did not like our conversation today. It is nobody's fault. The fault, if at all, is of the circumstances. What can you or I do for it? You go by your experience, I by mine. You know I have been at a loss to understand a number of things which you have done. . . . You speak in the Committee with much heat. I do not like it. On top of it today came the question of the Constituent Assembly. . . . All this is not by way of complaint. But I see, we are drifting in different directions."

To this the Sardar replied: "What can I say after your letter? I must be at fault. Only I cannot yet see it and that makes me feel unhappy. I do not *want* to take a different path. . . . My own instinct was to the contrary but if I had not done what I did, the Congress would have been held to blame afterwards. . . . I do betray some heat when I speak in the Committee. . . . That is a temperamental defect . . . but there is nothing in it."

And so they maintained their unity in spite of their difference, each acting according to his light and respecting the other all the more for it.

10

The Working Committee's decision of 25th June did not solve the difficulty, for the Cabinet Mission adhered to their own interpretation of the disputed clauses; but it enabled the difficulty to be shelved for the time being. The Cabinet Mission met and "decided" that the Congress decision was an acceptance of their 16th May plan, and, therefore, both the Congress and the Muslim League had qualified for entering into the Interim Government. They, therefore, postponed further negotiations for the formation of the Interim Government for some time and left Delhi for London on the 29th June.

Those who were prematurely jubilant over what was blazoned as a rift between Gandhiji and the Working Committee were doomed to disappointment. They did not realise how non-violence works. Gandhiji spiritedly defended the Working Committee for acting according to its lights. His own darkness, he observed, indicated a lack of faith in God. "One, whose whole being is filled with God, should never experience darkness."[44] What was more, he could not give reasons for his fear. "Those whose function is to give lead to the country cannot afford to be guided by another's unreasoned instinct. They cannot guide the destiny of the country unless they have the capacity to think for themselves and convince others by reason. The members of the Working Committee are the servants of the nation. They have no other sanction except the willing consent of the people whom they are out to serve. . . . The people should follow the lead given by the Working Committee."[45]

What was the nature of his suspicion, then, for which he could give no tangible reason, yet which he considered important enough to present to his colleagues and the members of the Cabinet Delegation? What was its rationale? An inkling was provided by an interview which Louis Fischer, the American journalist and author, had with him on the 18th July:

"If the Working Committee had reacted to your 'groping in the dark' they would have rejected the Cabinet Mission's plan?"

"Yes, but I did not let them."

"You mean you did not insist."

"More than that, I prevented them from following my instinct unless they also felt likewise. Dr. Rajendra Prasad asked me, 'Does your instinct go so far that you would prevent us from accepting the long term proposals, whether we understand you or not?' I said, 'No, follow your reason since my own reason does not support my instinct.' I myself have not followed my instinct unless my reason backed it."

"But you have said that you follow your instinct when on occasions it speaks to you."

"Yes, but even in those cases my reason was able to follow up my instinct. My reason failed my instinct on the long term proposal."

"Then why did you inject your 'instinct' into the political situation?"

"Because I was loyal to my friends, because I also wanted to retain my faith in the *bonafides* of the Cabinet Mission. So I told the Cabinet Mission about my misgivings. I said to myself: Supposing they mean ill, they will feel ashamed. They will say, 'He says his *instinct* tells him so, but we know the reason.' Their guilty conscience will prick them."

"It did not . . . or do you mean to say there was nothing wrong?"

"My instinct proved right. You do not know the subsequent history. It would have proved disastrous if Kher (Bombay Chief Minister)

had not insisted on getting all reference to para 19 eliminated from the form to be signed by the candidates for the Constituent Assembly."

He had no distrust of the members of the Cabinet Mission or the Viceroy, he explained to Norman Cliff in an off-the-record interview on the 29th June, but he had distrust of "the way things have gone". What he had told the Cabinet Delegation at the very threshold of their career had proved true. They were unaware of the difficulties they would have to surmount. "They do not know them even now. . . . They have been brought up in one school of thought. With the greatest stretch of honesty they cannot think otherwise."

They admitted that the ideal course was to follow the democratic principle of handing over power to one or the other party. They agreed with him in principle that if they could not trust the League they should put the trust squarely on the shoulders of the Congress and rely upon it to do the right thing by India as a whole. But they felt, as Sir Stafford put it in his letter of 20th July to Gandhiji, that in the circumstances in which they were placed, they must try "for the cooperation of both sides"; at another time "when the internal frictions were less" a different course might have been possible. They had, therefore, to follow not the best or the ideal course but the second best course "because the theoretically best is not practicable".

Their conclusion was unassailable if the assumption on which it was based was conceded. Underlying their attitude was the assumption that they could not divest themselves of the "moral obligation" to find a solution acceptable to both the parties before they could part with power. To Gandhiji this concern for the minorities was a relic of imperialism, "unconscious if you like", which the British Labour Government could not shake off in spite of their leftist protestations. They had to discard it and "dare to do the right even though they displease some." That could not be done in the Imperialistic way.[46]

Very significant to Gandhiji too was the hesitation which he had noticed in Lord Pethick-Lawrence during his silent interview with the Cabinet Delegation on the morning of the 24th June. Did it indicate a mental reservation on their part that their own interpretation of the disputed clauses in their 16th May statement would be adhered to, as ultimately it was, in spite of everything? Was there a snag in it and were they deliberately allowing the Congress to blunder on in the dark? If so, it was dangerous. Whether the State Paper of 16th May came under the operation of the principles governing the interpretation of Parliamentary statutes or State documents, where the intention is left to be inferred from the text, or whether it fell under the category of contracts and agreements, where the "intention" of the parties determines the meaning of the text, the issue really became irrelevant after the Cabinet Mission's ruling of 26th June which carried with it consequential acceptance of the interpretation with which the Working Committee of the Congress had

accepted the 16th May plan. He had a vague feeling that they were holding some cards up their sleeve which they had not put on the table and which might be produced later. He was very averse to engaging in a game of this sort with seasoned British diplomats. It was not diplomacy that had enabled India to cover the track of a century in the span of a single generation and brought her from 150 years of slavery to the threshold of freedom. Not diplomacy but Satyagraha was his forte.

Finally, the way in which the Viceroy's Reforms Office had tried to carry on was to Gandhiji an ominous sign. He had time and again expressed his conviction that India would not come into her own before the Indian "steel-frame" was converted. As Srinivas Sastry had observed at the end of the Second Round Table Conference in London, many a good intention emanating from Whitehall had before been assassinated in the "dark corridors of the New Delhi Secretariat". Would old history repeat itself? Had the Cabinet Mission come before their time?

Incorrigible optimist that he was, he continued to hope against hope and work for the success of the Mission in spite of his misgivings and even in spite of themselves. At the same time he did not hide from them or the public his honest doubt. "Trust put on is worse than useless," he wrote to Sir Stafford on the 27th May. "Trust felt is the thing that counts. . . . Trustworthy action (on the part of the Cabinet Mission) will dispel all mistrust or distrust as the sun dispels the morning mist."

11

On the 28th June, Gandhiji left Delhi for Poona. In the small hours of the night while proceeding at full speed between Neral and Karjat, the special train bearing him bumped against some boulders which seemed to have been deliberately placed on the track to derail it. The dynamo of the rear bogie was wrecked and the ironwork under the engine damaged. But for the presence of mind of the engine-driver, Mr. Pereira, who pulled up the train in time, there might have been a terrible accident. Whilst for over two hours during the night gangs of mechanics were at work, loosening and removing the wrecked steel structures, Gandhiji continued to sleep the sleep of the just and the innocent amidst the din and clangour of hammer blows. Asked next morning if he knew what had happened during the night, he exclaimed, "Oh! I was not aware of it!" Wrote Norman Cliff, who was travelling by the same train and had got down at a wayside station before the accident: "May I assure you that when I left your train at dead of night, I did not go ahead and place boulders on the line! The world has reason to be grateful for your preservation, as I, a small fragment of it, have."[47]

The darkness had not yet lifted, if possible it had deepened, when the All-India Congress Committee met at Bombay on the 7th July. The opposition to the Congress acceptance of the long term plan was mostly

from the Socialists and other leftist groups and it was to them that the bulk of Gandhiji's remarks at the A.I.C.C. were addressed: "You know my relations with the members of the Working Committee.... I could have asked them to turn down the proposal about the Constituent Assembly ... but I could not adduce any reason for it.... Their decision which ... is unanimous is before you.... The members of the Working Committee are your faithful and tried servants; you should not lightly reject their resolution." Characterising as defeatist the Socialists' fear that the Constituent Assembly might prove a trap and a snare, he proceeded:

I am willing to admit that the proposed Constituent Assembly is not the Parliament of the people. It has many defects. But you are all seasoned and veteran fighters. A soldier is never afraid of danger. He revels in it. If there are shortcomings in the proposed Constituent Assembly, it is for you to get them removed. It should be a challenge to combat, not a ground for rejection. I am surprised that Shri Jayaprakash Narayan said yesterday that it would be dangerous to participate in the proposed Constituent Assembly and they should, therefore, reject the Working Committee's resolution. I was not prepared to hear such defeatist language from the lips of a tried fighter like Jayaprakash. ...A Satyagrahi knows no defeat.

Nor would I expect a Satyagrahi to say that whatever Englishmen do must be bad. The English are not necessarily bad. There are good men and bad men among the English people as among any other people. The English could not have risen to their present strength if they had not some good in them. We ourselves are not free from defects.... Some people say that Satyagraha is of no avail against a person who has no moral sense. I join issue with that. The stoniest heart must melt if we are true and have enough patience. A Satyagrahi lays down his life, but never gives up. That is the meaning of "Do or Die"....

This is no time for dalliance or ease.... The Constituent Assembly is going to be no bed of roses for you but a bed of thorns. You may not shirk it....

If you asked me whether in the event of your rejecting the proposed Constituent Assembly or the Constituent Assembly failing to materialise, I would advise the people to launch civil disobedience, individual or mass, or undertake a fast myself, my reply would be "No". I believe in walking alone. I came alone in this world, I have walked alone in the valley of the shadow of death and I shall quit alone, when the time comes. I know I am quite capable of launching Satyagraha even if I am all alone. I have done so before. But this is no occasion for a fast or civil disobedience. I regard the Constituent Assembly as the substitute of Satyagraha. It is constructive Satyagraha.

The alternative is constructive work to which you have never done justice. ...But a Satyagrahi cannot delay action till perfect conditions are obtained. He will act with whatever material is at hand, purge it of dross and convert it into pure gold....

Let us not be cowardly in our approach but face our task with confidence and courage. Let not the fear of being deceived dismay us. No-one can deceive a Satyagrahi. Never mind the darkness that fills my mind. God will turn it into light.

On being put to vote the resolution of the Congress Working Committee accepting the Cabinet Mission's plan of 16th May, was carried —204 voting for and 51 against.

Six months later Gandhiji's view was still unchanged that his "instinct" was right and that the Working Committee were also right in rejecting it.

CHAPTER IX

DIRECT ACTION

1

AFTER THE meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay in the second week of July, Gandhiji moved up to Panchgani for the warm weather. Two months in the year of mountain air had become a necessity to him to keep his body-battery going during his later years. It was nice and cool, with passing sunshine and cloud, when the party arrived there. The air was mild and agreeable and a dreamy silence seemed to brood eternally on the surrounding lonely hilltops. After dark, myriads of fire-flies lighted up the inky darkness of the wooded hill-slopes and the mist-filled valleys till they looked like a replica of the starry firmaments above. Gandhiji seemed to be unmindful of these. He was worried only about the rice crop which was threatened with failure for lack of timely rains. The rains at last descended and brought with them a chill, blustering wind which penetrated to the very marrow of one's bones and surly weather imprisoned everyone within doors. But Gandhiji felt happy in anticipation of the golden harvest which in due season would fill the barns of the poor cultivators.

Gandhiji's profoundest feelings were always stirred by the contemplation of the lives of the poor. Poverty was to him what the "state of Nature" was to the Romanticists. He drew an idealised picture of voluntary poverty, which is God's dearest gift to those who are his very own, in one of his post-prayer addresses at Panchgani. Poverty in their country, he remarked, had a dignity all its own. The poor man was not ashamed of his poverty. Though poor in material goods he was not poor in spirit. To a certain extent inequality of possessions was inevitable in society, since all were not born with equal talents. It was open to the poor to say to themselves: "Since we cannot all become rich and own palaces, let us at least pull down the palaces of the rich and bring them down to our level." That, however, could bring no happiness or peace either to them or to anyone else, and God would certainly be not the friend and helper of the poor of such description. But in India there was a type of man who delighted in having as few needs as possible. He carried with him only a little flour and a pinch of salt and chillies tied in his napkin. He had a *lota* and a string to draw water from wells. He needed nothing else. He walked on foot covering 10 to 12 miles a day. He made the dough in his napkin, collected a few twigs to make a fire and baked his

dough on the embers. Such a man had God as his companion and friend and felt richer than any king or emperor.[1]

* * *

The Indian community in South Africa had started a heroic struggle against the anti-Indian land-tenure legislation that had been introduced by the South African Union Government and a deputation headed by Sohrab Rustamji, the son of Parsi Rustamji, the veteran Satyagrahi fighter of the South African Satyagraha struggle, with several other young men, who had had their training in Satyagraha under Gandhiji in South Africa, had come to India in that connection. They had several meetings with him. They admitted that there were dissensions among them. Gandhiji reminded them that blacklegs were not wanting in the South African Indian community even while he was there half-a-century ago, but during the final phase of the South African Satyagraha they all rose like one man. "Repeat that history today and you win. Do not repeat it and you fail."[2]

"We are a difficult community at times," remarked one of them. "And quarrelsome too," added another. Besides, the mercantile community, they complained, was not with them.

If not even one merchant came forward, replied Gandhiji, the whole of the merchant community would be wiped out. But they must not feel dispirited; the struggle would then take a different turn. He recalled how in the first article that he wrote for *Indian Opinion* he had said that if after all there was one true man in South Africa, he would cover all. He had in that article further written that "amidst a whole heap of bad coins, if there is one true sovereign, the heap will be worth that one sovereign. . . . If you produce one civil resister of merit he will pull things through. Do not start the struggle . . . unless you have that stuff."

One of the deputation asked him what his opinion was about forming an anti-White front with the Zulus and Bantus. Gandhiji was wholly in favour of it. But he warned them that it would be disastrous if in the attempt to take a common anti-White front, they allowed themselves to be torn away from their moorings. "One day the black races will rise like an avenging Attila against their White oppressors unless someone presents to them the weapon of Satyagraha. . . . It will be good if you can fire them with the spirit of non-violence. You will be then their saviours. But if you allow yourselves to be overwhelmed and swept off your feet, it will be their and your ruin."

Another member spoke of the divisive tactics of the White man: "We Indians take advantage of the Bantus. . . . We are ashamed to call ourselves natives. . . . They are getting resentful and the White man encourages . . . that feeling to widen the gulf."

"It will be an evil day for you if he succeeds," Gandhiji replied.

The delegation asked him if a leader could not be sent from India to organise and lead them. Gandhiji told them that a leader would have to rise from among them. He hoped they would throw up one in due time. He mentioned in this connection how he had been urging his son Manilal to train his children for the task and how in pursuance of that principle he (Gandhiji) had refused to send his own children to Lovedale and Fort Hare, and so Manilal and his whole family were there with them in their struggle.

The India Government had adopted a policy of reciprocity as a protest against the anti-Indian legislation of the South African Government. In the course of a conversation with Gandhiji, Louis Fischer mentioned to him that in the Taj Mahal Hotel, in Bombay, the management had put up a notice: "South Africans not admitted". "I do not like it," he remarked. "Your non-violence should make you more generous."

"That won't be non-violence," Gandhiji replied. "Today the White man rules in India. So, if the Taj Mahal has the gumption to put up that notice it is a feather in its cap."[3]

"That is what any nationalist will say. You must say something better."

"Then I will be a nationalist for once."

"There is so much of anti-White feeling today," resumed Fischer. "Europe is terribly exhausted. But with the atom bomb human beings do not matter so much. . . . That is why colour war is so dangerous."

"Anything is better than cowardice; cowardice is violence double distilled," replied Gandhiji, and to illustrate his meaning he narrated the story of a Negro clergyman with a Herculean frame in South Africa. "Pardon me brother," this coloured clergyman exclaimed when insulted by a White man, and sneaked into a coloured man's compartment. "That is not non-violence. It is travesty of Jesus' teaching. It would have been more manly to retaliate."

* * *

There was a section among Congressmen which held that the best use that the Congress could make of the Constituent Assembly was to capture it, declare it to be a sovereign body and turn it to revolutionary account after the pattern of the States General in France. Gandhiji strongly deprecated that line of thinking. "Not while I am alive", he remarked. It would be dishonourable, he held, for the Congress to sneak into the Constituent Assembly under false colours like that. He could never be a party to it. He did not regard the proposed Constituent Assembly to be non-revolutionary. Nor did a body become a sovereign body by merely asserting it. "To become sovereign you have to behave in a sovereign way."[4] As an illustration he recounted the story of three tailors of Tooley Street in Johannesburg who declared themselves a sovereign body! "It ended in nothing. It was just a farce."

Was it for fear of the alternative, violence, that he had turned strongly constitutionalist? Louis Fischer asked him. Gandhiji replied that if India was destined to go through a blood-bath it would do so. It was not violence he was afraid of. "The thing I would fear is my own cowardice or dishonesty."[5] He had advised the country to go into the Constituent Assembly because "it is (was) repugnant to a non-violent attitude not to accept an honourable substitute for civil revolt."[6]

"Give us a chance; what would you have us do next?" an Indian National Army captain came and asked Gandhiji.

"There was perfect unity in the ranks of the I. N. A. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis, all communities were like blood-brothers. . . . Demonstrate that unity here," Gandhiji replied.[7]

This was, however, not what the captain was driving at. "What should be *our* contribution in the *next* struggle for independence?" he asked to make his query more explicit.

"The struggle for independence is going on today; it has never stopped," answered Gandhiji. "But if my will prevails, it will be a non-violent struggle."

* * *

Neither the fresh, misty, ozone-laden air, blown from the surrounding green hills, nor the life-giving silence of the place which one drank in through every pore of one's being, could detain Gandhiji longer than absolutely necessary at Panchgani. He felt spiritually home-sick, and, in the second week of August, decided to return to Sevagram and the tumult and shouting of the dusty plains. Well-trimmed fields and spruce little hamlets nestled peacefully in the valleys below, as the descent began, looking like a rich, plush carpet laid out in neat geometrical designs in dark green and gold, and gleaming with innumerable tiny mirrors and sinuous streaks of silver as the water-filled paddy-beds and rivulets reflected the rich glow of the afternoon sun. *En route* Gandhiji stopped for a couple of days at Uruli Kanchan, where the engagements proved to be unexpectedly heavy. "It is to be seen what Sevagram can do for me," he remarked one day, groaning under the burden. "It is not, however, the burden that matters," he added, "but absence of detachment. I have not yet learnt sufficiently to leave things to God. But that must not become an additional cause for worry if one has a living faith in God."[8]

2

In the fourth week of June, while the Congress Working Committee was busy in Delhi with its deliberations which culminated in its decision accepting the long term plan of the Cabinet Mission while rejecting their short term proposal, the Working Committee of the Muslim League was sitting in another part of the city in continuous

session, impatiently waiting for the news of the Congress decision. Having secured for itself a position of vantage by virtue of its acceptance of the 16th May plan of the Cabinet Mission, with its own interpretation about grouping which the Cabinet Mission had endorsed, and the further assurances contained in Lord Wavell's letter of the 20th June (see page 220), which the Congress could not acquiesce in without committing political suicide, the League felt confident that the Congress having thus been effectively disposed of, the League would now be called upon exclusively to form an Interim Government. But it wanted to be sure of its kill first.

Jinnah had long followed the tactics of holding back his hand till the Congress had made known its decision and then deciding his line of action. He had flourished on it. But for once he overplayed his hand. On the evening of the 25th June, after receipt of the Congress reply, the Viceroy and the Cabinet Mission sent for him but instead of inviting him to form the Interim Government without the Congress, as he had expected, they informed him that according to their view, both the Congress and the Muslim League having accepted the 16th May plan, they had both qualified for participation in the Interim Government. In view, however, of the inability of the Congress to cooperate in the formation of an Interim Government as proposed in their statement of 16th June, a situation had arisen in which para 8 of the statement took effect. This para said that if either of the two major parties was unwilling to join in the setting up of a *Coalition* Government on the lines laid down in that statement, the Viceroy would proceed with the formation of an Interim Government (obviously on a new basis and not necessarily coalition) which would be as representative as possible of those willing to accept the statement of 16th May. What was Jinnah's opinion?

Jinnah emphatically dissented from this view. He asked the Cabinet Mission to give him in *writing* what they proposed to do. But it seems he felt so sure of his ground (or was it his power?) that from the Viceroy's House he went straight to the Working Committee of the Muslim League and without waiting for the letter from the Cabinet Mission, got the League to pass a resolution accepting the 16th June proposal for the formation of the Interim Government. He contended that under para 8 of their 16th June proposals, acceptance of the 16th May plan and rejection of 16th June statement by the Congress could not change the basis and principle laid down there and, therefore, the Viceroy was in honour bound to proceed with the formation of the Government without the Congress. But the Cabinet Mission took the view that "if either the Congress or the Muslim League would not consent to come into the Coalition Government, then the scheme for *Coalition* Government went because it would no longer be a coalition and we (they) should have to find some *other* Interim Government of those who accepted the scheme of 16th May."[9] (Italics mine). The Congress having accepted the 16th

May statement, they held, was entitled to be invited to that Government as the biggest political organisation of the country. Accordingly, on the 26th June, they issued a statement to the effect that since it had not been found possible to form an Interim *Coalition* Government on the basis of the 16th June proposal, in accordance with para 8 of the proposal, further efforts for the formation of the Interim Government would be resumed after a short break during the time while the elections for the Constituent Assembly would be taking place.

The Muslim League was angry. It felt it had been out-manœuvred, let down, deceived. Jinnah demanded that since formation of an Interim Government had been shelved the election to the Constituent Assembly should also be postponed, and when that demand was turned down by the Cabinet Delegation, he accused the Cabinet Mission of flagrant "breach of faith", characterising the Cabinet Mission's interpretation of para 8 as "most fantastic and dishonest".

Jinnah's discomfiture evoked very little sympathy. The general verdict was that the "engineer was hoist with his own petard". But Gandhiji felt hurt and even humiliated. "They (the Cabinet Mission) should not have dealt with him (Jinnah) in that legalistic manner," he said. "He is a great Indian and the recognised leader of a great organisation."

The League Council met and, on the 29th July, withdrew its previous acceptance of the 16th May plan of the Cabinet Mission. It further decided to launch "Direct Action" to achieve Pakistan and "to organise the Muslims for the coming struggle to be launched as and when necessary." The 16th of August was declared as "Direct Action" day, to be observed all over India as a day of protest.

Immediately after the "Direct Action" resolution had been passed, Jinnah, in the concluding session of the Council of the Muslim League, declared amid cheers: "Today we bid good-bye to constitutional methods." And again: "We have also forged a pistol and are in a position to use it."

Elucidating his meaning further in a Press conference on the 31st July, Jinnah said that while both the British Government and the Congress were armed in their own way, one with fire weapons and the other with the threat of mass struggle, the Muslim League felt it was high time it also forged its own sanctions and got ready for a struggle to enforce its demand for Pakistan.[10] He declined to discuss the details of the proposed "Direct Action" saying, "I am not prepared to tell you that now." Questioned as to whether it would be violent or non-violent, he replied, "I am not going to discuss ethics."

But Khwaja Nazimuddin, the League leader from Bengal, was less reticent. Asked by a Press representative to explain the implications of the Direct Action decision of the Muslim League, he said: "There are a hundred and one ways in which we can create difficulties, especially

when we are not restricted to non-violence. The Muslim population of Bengal knows very well what Direct Action would mean and we need not bother to give them any lead."[11]

"Direct Action," explained Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, the right-hand man of Jinnah, to the Associated Press of America, meant "resorting to non-constitutional methods and that can take any form and whatever form may suit the conditions under which we live."[12] He further added: "We cannot eliminate any method. Direct Action means action against the law."

Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar, League leader from North-West Frontier, was explicit even to the point of indiscretion. He was reported to have said that Pakistan could only be achieved by shedding blood and if opportunity arose the blood of non-Muslims must be shed, for "Muslims are not believers in Ahimsa."[13]

Was this then the "pistol" which Jinnah had declared they had forged and which they were "in a position to use"? If so, the "pistol" had not only been in existence but very much in use since the Cabinet Delegation's refusal on the 26th June to hand over the Interim Government at the Centre to the Muslim League alone, or to postpone elections to the Constituent Assembly as demanded by Jinnah. There were communal disturbances and planned hooliganism in Ahmedabad, Bombay, Allahabad, Aligarh, Dacca and other places. Stabbings and dastardly attacks on innocent, inoffensive passers-by by unknown hooligans became endemic. Mysterious consignments of knives, daggers and other lethal weapons were reported and intercepted by the police at various places all over India, even when the Cabinet Mission's negotiations were in progress.

In pursuance of their resolution of the 29th July, the Muslim League set up a Council of Action. It met behind closed doors but the programme of action which it drew up and which was subsequently elaborated and broadcast by the Muslim League Press was clear enough. The Muslims were reminded that it was in the month of Ramzan that the "first open conflict between Islam and Heathenism" was fought and won by 313 Muslims in Arabia. A leaflet containing a special prayer for the crusade announced that ten crores of Indian Muslims "who through bad luck had become slaves of Hindus and the British" would be starting "a Jehad in this very month of Ramzan". Another leaflet bearing a picture of Jinnah with sword in hand, said: "We Muslims have had the Crown and have ruled. Be ready and take your swords. . . . O Kafer! . . . your doom is not far and the general massacre will come!"

* * *

A Muslim League Government with Shaheed Suhrawardy as the Chief Minister was in power in Bengal. After the rupture between the League and the Cabinet Mission, Suhrawardy had declared that if the Congress were put in power at the Centre, Bengal would raise the

standard of rebellion. No part of the Provincial revenues would be paid to the Centre and Bengal would set up an independent State owing no allegiance to the Central Government.

Elaborate preparations were made in Calcutta for Direct Action in advance. As Minister in-charge of the portfolio of Law and Order, Suhrawardy began transferring systematically Hindu police officers from key posts. On the 16th August, twenty-two police stations out of twenty-four in Calcutta were thus in the charge of Muslim officers and the remaining two were controlled by Anglo-Indians. The 16th August was declared a public holiday throughout the Province by the Bengal Government in spite of the warning and protests of the opposition in the Provincial Assembly. Regulation *lathis*, spears, hatchets, daggers and other lethal weapons including firearms were distributed in large numbers beforehand to the Muslims. Transport for League volunteers and Muslim hooligans was arranged. Rationing difficulties were overcome by issuing supplementary petrol coupons to the extent of several hundred gallons to the Ministers, and by the Chief Minister to himself, just before the Direct Action day. Thorough, systematic and extensive arrangements were made for the treatment of casualties that were expected during the Direct Action day. A first-aid centre was established in sight of the place where the mass rally of the Muslims on the Direct Action day was to be held in Calcutta maidan. It was also arranged that every major procession should have its own first-aid equipment.

At Howrah, arms were reported to have been distributed to the hooligans through a Muslim M.L.A. (Sharif Khan), who controlled the goonda element in the locality and was known to be a henchman of Suhrawardy. Mohammad Usman, the then Muslim League Mayor of Calcutta, and Secretary of the Calcutta Muslim League, accompanied by Sharif Khan personally visited Howrah area and was reported to have incited the hooligans to violence.

Direct Action programme reached its culmination in the Great Calcutta Killing on 16th, 17th and 18th August. From the mid-night of 15th August, organised bands of Muslims variously armed were seen moving about the streets rending the silence of the night by their militant cries and slogans. The dawn of the 16th August broke on a cloudy and threatening sky but the rain held off till evening. Muslim hooligans got busy from early morning on the 16th. By mid-day, normal activities were paralysed in many parts of the city. A huge procession of Muslims armed with *lathis*, spears and daggers started from Howrah for Calcutta to attend the mass rally. It was stopped by a European sergeant at the Howrah Bridge. The processionists were disarmed, the lethal weapons and incendiary material recovered from them making two truck-loads.

The conflagration became general towards evening and pandemonium prevailed all over the city when the swelling, unruly mobs

returning from the maidan after the grand rally, presided over by Suhrawardy, began to interfere with those who did not join the *hartal*. Their shops were looted, and the contents of the shops thrown into the streets; private cars and trams were burnt; stray pedestrians were assaulted and stabbed. All vehicular traffic and essential services were brought to a standstill. The only vehicles seen on the streets were the Muslim League lorries and jeeps loaded with Muslim hooligans, shouting Pakistan slogans and inciting the mob to violence.

Inferno was let loose on the city during the next two days converting it into a vast shambles. Had not Sir Feroz Khan Noon, the ex-member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, speaking before the Muslim League Legislators' Convention in April, 1946, declared that in the event of their having to fight Great Britain "for placing us (them) under one Central Government, the havoc which the Muslims would play would put to shame what Chengiz Khan and Halaku did?" While organised bands of hooligans elaborately armed and equipped for their destructive mission, carrying Muslim League flags and shouting Pakistan cries, indulged in an unrestrained orgy of murder, arson, rape and looting, the police on the whole, especially for the first two days, stood passively by. There were numerous complaints of deliberate inaction on the part of police officials. The military was called in on the third day when the tide of battle had already turned against those who had started the conflagration. Giving his appreciation of the situation on the evening of the 17th August, when the military under him took charge of the city, Brigadier Sixsmith, the Area Commander, stated that "the police had not hitherto fired a single round. In one or two cases tear-gas had been used."

To make confusion worse confounded, Suhrawardy established himself in the Control Room of the Police Headquarters, received messages, issued verbal and written instructions, overrode decisions made by the police chief and generally interfered with their work. Towards evening on the 16th August, Inspector Wade caught eight Muslims red-handed with a lorry-load of the looted goods with them and sent them under arrest to the police station. Suhrawardy appeared there shortly afterwards and ordered their immediate release on "his personal responsibility". A complaint about his conduct in the Control Room was made to the Governor and a request made that the Chief Minister should keep away from the Control Room.

The looting and killing went on for forty hours in some localities. The streets were strewn with dead bodies and the foul odour of decayed and decaying corpses, which lay unattended for days, filled the air. Dead bodies had been pushed down the manholes with the result that the drains were choked. Dead bodies lay in heaps in the by-lanes, providing a gruesome feast to street dogs, jackals and vultures; they were seen floating down the river; there were stories of children being hurled

down from the roofs of the houses or burnt alive; of women being raped, mutilated and then killed.

Wrote Kim Christen in *The Statesman:* "I have a stomach made strong by the experience of a war hospital, but war was never like this."[14] "This is not a riot," commented *The Statesman* editorially. "It needs a word found in medieval history, a fury. Yet 'fury' sounds spontaneous and there must have been some deliberation and organisation to set this fury on the way. Hordes who ran about battering and killing with eight-foot *lathis* may have found them lying about or bought them out of their own pockets, but that is hard to believe. We have already commented on the bands who found it easy to get petrol and vehicles when no others were permitted on the streets. It is not mere supposition that men were imported into Calcutta to help in making an impression."[15]

In the same issue, in a leading article entitled "Disgrace Abounding", the paper commented:

> The origin of the appalling carnage and loss in the capital of a great Province—we believe the worst communal riot in India's history—was a political demonstration by the Muslim League....In retrospect its conduct before the riots stands open to the inference—not only by political opponents—that it was divided in mind on whether rioting of some sort would be good or bad. ...The bloody shambles to which this country's largest city has been reduced is an abounding disgrace, which, owing to the Bengal Ministry's pre-eminence as a League Ministry, has inevitably tarnished seriously the all-India reputation of the League itself.

A fitter instrument could not have been found to put into effect the "Direct Action" programme of the League than the Bengal Chief Minister. Efficient, intelligent and dynamic, he had the further advantage of being completely untroubled by that "hob-goblin of little minds" consistency! On the 21st August, after the Great Calcutta Killing, in a radio broadcast, he expressed the most admirable sentiments, urging the people to live in peace and brotherly affection. At the same time he made another statement[16] of a wholly different character to the foreign Press which forced *The Statesman* to remark editorially that it was "hardly honest" on the part of the Bengal Premier to give to foreign news agencies "apparently for exclusive use overseas" a statement which indicated that "the Minister has (had) little compunction in interpreting the same events almost simultaneously, in widely inconsistent terms, to different publics of his choice."[17] On the evening of 16th August, when the trouble was at its height and the situation was fast deteriorating all over the city, he issued a statement to the Associated Press of India that conditions were improving. He afterwards denied that he had issued any such statement. Later, answering the charge of culpable failure to take adequate preventive measures beforehand, he denied that the authorities had received any reports beforehand of "preparedness on

the part of either the Hindus or the Muslims". The report of the Commissioner of Police on the Calcutta disturbances afterwards, however, clearly showed that the Intelligence Department *had received definite information* among other things, that (1) "goonda elements among the Muslims might cause disturbances if non-Muslims did not observe the *hartal*", and (2) that "instructions had been issued to several Muslim hostels to make preparations to set fire to tram cars and military lorries on the 16th." Even the military would not appear to have been wholly ignorant of these preparations. For, during the evidence before the Spens Inquiry Commission on Calcutta disturbances, Brigadier Sixsmith stated that on the 10th August, General Bucher had sent for him and warned him of the possibility of trouble on the Muslim League's Direct Action day.

It was estimated that more than five thousand persons were killed and more than fifteen thousand injured during the Great Calcutta Killing. Jinnah characterised it as an organised plot on the part of Hindus to discredit the League and the League Ministry of Bengal, and blamed it all on the Cabinet Delegation, the Congress, and on Gandhiji!

3

Gandhiji was at Sevagram Ashram when the news of the Great Calcutta Killing came through. Addressing the inmates of the Ashram on the 24th August after the evening congregational prayer, he asked them to ponder what their duty was in the face of the conflagration which had overtaken the country. "Let us be humble and confess that we have not got the strength today to meet all the expectations that the people entertain of us." If they had realised fully the principles for which the Ashram stood, they should have rushed into the blaze and offered the purest sacrifice which might have "conceivably quenched the flames". A pure sacrifice did not mean "the thoughtless annihilation of the moth in the flame. Sacrifice to be effective must be . . . willing and . . . made in faith and hope, without a trace of ill will or hatred in the heart. . . . There is nothing that such sacrifice cannot achieve." He ended with the prayer that God might vouchsafe to them the requisite purity and fearlessness in the true sense of the term to make their sacrifice worthy of the altar.[18]

He read in the Great Calcutta Killing and its aftermath the challenge of freedom to the people of India. His seeing eye peered far into the shape of things to come. "We are not yet in the midst of civil war. But we are nearing it," he observed in *Harijan*. "At present we are playing at it. . . . If the British are wise, they will keep clear of it. Appearances are to the contrary."[19] It was as if God had come "with His awful light and His thunder" to awaken them at a time when their minds were "blinded with delusion and dust".[20] The hour had come for the

people to make their final choice between Pax Britannica and freedom. The British authority having decided to quit, he predicted, would thereafter show more and more weaknesses and fissures. "The parties will find that it is . . . a broken reed."[21] If the fratricidal strife extended to the whole of India and the British gunpowder kept the two from stabbing one another, he warned, the inevitable result would be that "the British Power or its substitute will be in possession of India for a long time to come. The length will be measured by the period required by the parties coming to sanity. It will come either after an exhausting mutual fight, independent of the foreign element or by one party eschewing violence in spite of the heaviest odds."[22]

"Some even doubt," he observed, "the possibility of the exercise of non-violence by groups, much less by masses of people. They restrict its exercise to exceptional individuals. Only, mankind can have no use for it if it is always reserved only for individuals."[23] At any rate, if the people were not ready for the exercise of the non-violence of the brave, they should be ready for the use of force for self-defence. But self-defence in that case would be a clean, simple affair. What was happening—hit and run—was both dastardly and crude. Opinions might differ, he said, as to whether it was good that they were a people unarmed and untrained in the use of arms. But there could be no denying the fact "that no-one needs training in the use of arms in self-defence. What is wanted for the purpose is strong arms and stronger will."[24]

Though many had shouted freedom, few were fully prepared to purchase it at that price. They reacted to Gandhiji's virile advice with incredulity, bordering upon consternation. Wrote one such perplexed correspondent to Gandhiji, referring to the Calcutta happenings: "Sermons on non-violence from afar are of little use. To have offered non-violent resistance would have meant allowing all property to be destroyed and every Hindu to be killed. What is our duty in such circumstances?" Prompt came Gandhiji's reply: "The Congress Working Committee has given the clearest possible lead. . . . Fratricide will not abate by intimidation and violence. . . . *If through deliberate courage the Hindus had died to a man, that would have been deliverance of Hinduism and India and purification for Islam in this land. As it was, a third party had to intervene. . . . Neither the Muslims nor the Hindus . . . have gained by the intervention.*"[25] (Italics mine). And again: Let "Hindus and Muslims . . . realise that if India is to be an independent nation, one or both must deliberately cease to look to British authority for protection. . . . My advice is Satyagraha first and Satyagraha last. . . . Whoever wants to drink the ozone of freedom must steel himself against seeking military or police aid. He or they must ever rely upon their own strong arms or what is infinitely better their strong mind and will which are independent of arms, their own or others'."[26]

4

The Muslim League having withdrawn its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's plan of 16th May, 1946, and committed itself to Direct Action, nothing remained for the Viceroy but to invite the Congress to form an Interim Government, which he did on the 6th August. On the 2nd September, an Interim Government consisting of Pandit Nehru's nominees was installed into power. Before submitting his list of the Cabinet members to the Viceroy, Pandit Nehru once more tried to persuade Jinnah to cooperate with the Congress in the formation of the Interim Government, but he declined the invitation, and the Muslim League observed the day by staging a black flag demonstration before the secretariat in New Delhi.

Simultaneously, there was a recrudescence of sporadic stabbing in various places. An attempt to assassinate Sir Shafat Ahmed Khan, a non-League Muslim who had agreed to join Pandit Nehru's Government, was made at Simla presumably by some Muslim League fanatic, who left him for dead by the roadside with severe knife gashes on his body. Shafi Ahmed Kidwai, brother of Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, the nationalist Muslim Minister of U.P., was done to death at Mussoorie. Calcutta itself continued to seethe and simmer like the witches' cauldron during the months of August, September and October. After the first shock of Direct Action, the non-Muslim population of Calcutta organised itself and hit back with a parallel fury. The initial savagery was horrid but the reprisals were severe and out of all proportion and in sheer barbarism there was not much left to choose between the one party or the other in the end.

From Calcutta, communal tension began to spread to the mofussil. The Muslim League continued its inflammatory propaganda of depicting the Hindus as "enemies" and of taking Pakistan by force. An anonymous letter with a picture of an assassin's dagger dripping blood, was received by Gandhiji. A map was published and widely circulated showing India Pakistanised and renamed "Dinia" (the land of the believers), divided up into about half a dozen "stans" (Faruqistan, Osmanistan, Bangistan etc.); Pakistan sprawling over east, west and south; Hindustan reduced to a small patch in U.P., and the rest of India turned into a "corridor" for the various Pakistan units! Even the seas and straits were Pakistanised and the origins of Pakistan traced through the geological eras as far back as the Atlantis myth with a fanatical thoroughness and obliteration of all distinction between fact and fiction which would have made even a Goebbels or a Rosenberg turn green with envy. Maulvis and fire-eating fanatics were sent into the interior to do propaganda and Muslim National Guards were reorganised. There was wild talk of "avenging" Calcutta.

Disturbing reports of unrest and lawlessness poured in from the mofussil. "Life and property are unsafe in Eastern Bengal," wrote one correspondent in *The Statesman* of 30th September. "Gangsters operate on railway lines, stop trains at places of their choice, rob and carry away the booty by boats or bullock carts before the news reaches the next station."

A letter from a Muslim gentleman appearing in *The Statesman* of the 12th September ran: "When I was travelling on August 14 (two days before the Direct Action day), I saw some Muslims freely selling long knives at the railway stations. When after the events at Calcutta I was travelling again by train on August 26, a Muslim gentleman occupied a first class compartment next to my second class. At every stop he incited the Muslims to butcher the 'Mirjafri' non-League Muslims and Hindus alike and illustrated this advice by gestures. (The name and influential office of this gentleman I specify for you privately at the end of the letter)."

Kamini Kumar Dutta, M.L.C. from Comilla (East Bengal) issued a statement detailing ten instances of incidents in Tipperah villages. These included attacks on Hindu shops, houses of rich men as well as of Kaibartas (Scheduled Castes). Houses of a large number of Kaibartas were looted and burnt in broad daylight by an organised mob, their valuables damaged and their fishing boats and nets forcibly taken away.[27] "What has alarmed us and the minority community in East Bengal," ran another Press statement of Kamini Kumar Dutta, "is the perilous, narrow margin which now divides order from anarchy in East Bengal. Muslim League propagandists are spreading exaggerated stories of alleged brutal atrocities said to have been committed by the Hindus upon the Muslims in Calcutta and this propaganda . . . is making the situation perilous to maintenance of law and order. To our knowledge a highly placed Muslim official was heard declaring that thousands of dead bodies will be seen . . . strewn over the country in no time. Once there is a large scale outbreak in any part of East Bengal, conflagration will spread throughout."[28]

That the Bengal Government were not unaware of the situation that was developing is clear from a statement in the course of which Suhrawardy, the Premier of Bengal, observed: "Yes, I have seen reports of this unfortunate communal tension in East Bengal. We must all deplore it." Yet, nothing was done to check the rising tide of communal lawlessness. The Frankenstein of communalism had burst its bonds but its keeper's concern was not that it had escaped but that its first performance was not up to the mark.

CHAPTER X

ZERO HOUR

1

In the struggle for Indian independence, in the final heat, there were three principal parties: The Congress, the Muslim League and the British Power represented by the Viceroy and senior British officials. As zero hour for the transfer of power drew near, they reacted to it each in its own characteristic manner.

To the Congress it was the supreme hour of consummation and fulfilment of its dream of triumphant nationalism, for which three generations of India's noblest sons had toiled and sacrificed. The Congress was the oldest and most widespread mass organisation. From its very inception it had represented all the different religions, Provinces and groups. It was founded through the inspiration of an Englishman, who for long was its Secretary—the late Allan Octavian Hume. It had had Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Englishmen (including two women, an Englishwoman and an Indian) as its Presidents. A Parsi, representing one of the smallest minorities in India, Dadabhai Naoroji, whom India delighted to call its Grand Old Man, was one of its makers. Another Parsi, Phirozeshah Mehta, was called its "uncrowned king". It had retained its catholic and national character all through the intervening years. At the time of the Cabinet Mission's negotiations it had 3 Muslims as members of its Working Committee out of 15, but it had as many as 5 at one time. It stood uncompromisingly for the ideal of the secular State in which all those who regarded India as their home would, irrespective of caste, creed or colour, share equally all rights and obligations.

Gandhiji stood as the soul, the conscience of this organisation, and a symbol of its hopes and aspirations. "Mahatma Gandhi," observed Pandit Nehru on the occasion of Gandhiji's 77th birthday, "has been . . . a sentinel to pull us up when we go astray. . . . We must rededicate ourselves anew to the great cause of India's freedom and human emancipation for which the Mahatma has stood, and we must do this in the way most liked by him . . . by earnest effort in furthering the constructive activities which he has so much at heart. . . . Undoubtedly, we shall take the final step (to freedom) under his wise guidance."[1] It was Gandhiji's fond hope that free India would point the way of peace and non-violence to the whole world. This found expression in his

post-prayer utterances and his directives to the members of the Interim Government.

As an organic mass organisation, the Congress always had tended towards a revolutionary and egalitarian ideal, which under Gandhiji's lead was canalised into a movement for a non-violent transformation of the existing social order. It was responsible for the awakening of the so-called Scheduled Caste among others, being pledged to complete eradication of "untouchability" in every shape and form, in law as well as in fact; and obliteration of all distinction between the caste and the out-caste.

In contrast with the Congress, the Muslim League had from its very inception, as its name implied, been a politico-religious organisation like its opposite number the Hindu Mahasabha. It frankly claimed exclusively to represent the interests of Indian Muslims, whom it had of late adopted the fashion of calling a "nation" in India separate from the other "nation" called Hindus. Logically it had not hesitated to describe other religious groups as "nations", such as Sikhs, Christians etc. It had not been through the travail and the discipline through which the Congress had passed. It had, as we have seen, kept out of the "Quit India" struggle, which Jinnah had characterised as an "attempt to bypass the League". The advent of Indian independence represented to it the long-dreaded evil day, connoting the paramountcy of the "Hindu Congress", as Jinnah called it, which had overtaken it in spite of its efforts to avert it. As against the Congress slogan of "Quit India" it had adopted the slogan "Divide and Quit". But Jinnah did not stop there. From "Divide and Quit" he had passed on to "divide and do quit" (i.e., by all means quit if you must but divide first), and ended with "divide and stay". He made no secret of his preference for the continuation of the British rule in India if the alternative was an India, in which, under a democratic constitution, the "Hindu Congress" might command a majority.

In his famous *News Chronicle* interview of the 29th February, 1944, he was questioned by Stewart Emeney whether by insisting on the division of India, he would not be creating an Indian Ulster which the Hindus might one day attack in the name of united India. His reply was: "I do not agree. But there would be under the new constitution a period for settlement and adjustment during which time British authority, so far as armed forces and foreign affairs are concerned, would remain paramount. *The length of the transitional period would depend on the speed with which the two people and Great Britain adjusted themselves to the new constitution.*" (Italics mine).

"What, if Britain then refused to leave India on the ground that relations between Hindustan and Pakistan were not good enough to live as neighbours?"

"*That might happen. . . . Even so we should enjoy a degree of autonomy which we do not possess today.*" (Italics mine).

Lastly, there was the British Power in India. It had fought a losing battle against the Congress for over a quarter of a century and was determined not to give in without making a final, rear-guard stand. If it could not retain power for itself, it could at least try to conserve as much of it and as long as possible, by putting it into the hands of its "traditional allies"—the Princely order, the Europeans and the Muslim League.

British foreign policy since the Second World War had very much been dominated by the British concern for their oil interests in the Middle East. The pivot of this policy, as developed by the Churchill-Hoare-Amery group, was the creation of a friendly bloc of Muslim States in the Middle East. This school of thought was represented in the councils of the Cabinet Delegation by Sir William Croft, who was at one time Private Secretary to Sir Samuel Hoare and was considered an expert in Middle East affairs, and by a powerful section of high British functionaries under Lord Wavell. One of them, Sir Olaf Caroe, the then Governor of the North-West Frontier Province, after his retirement, wrote a book, *Wells of Power*, which contained the germ of the Middle East Defence Organisation (M.E.D.O.) plan of the Anglo-American bloc.

Lord Wavell and these British officials could never shed their distrust of the Congress. They had equated it in their minds with "Hindu nationalism", which could never be friendly towards British interests, and in any case, had not much political value in their plan of Middle East strategy. In an undivided India, under independence, the Muslim League could be depended upon to neutralise the sinister "Hindu Congress" influence; in the case of India being divided, creation of a strong, sovereign, friendly Pakistan, on the north-western Indian border, would help to strengthen their Middle East policy.

The whole attitude and pattern of conduct of the higher British officials in India at this juncture provides an illustration of what Pandit Nehru characterised as a "mental alliance" between them and the Muslim League. Lord Wavell became a vehicle of their policies. Pandit Nehru complained afterwards that he found that the Viceroy was "gradually removing the wheels of the car"! The one consistent policy of these British officials was to equate Congress with the Muslim League and set up Jinnah as an equal and opposite number of Gandhiji.

Throughout the negotiations with the Cabinet Mission and after, there existed a close collaboration between these officials and the Muslim League. They kept the League High Command fully posted with the goings-on at their end and passed on to the League all important information in regard to the Congress plans likely to be of use to the League that reached them either in the normal course or through interception.

2

A week before the "Direct Action" resolution of the Muslim League, the Viceroy, in accordance with the statement made by the Cabinet Mission on the eve of their departure for England at the end of June, 1946, resumed his efforts for the formation of a coalition Interim Government at the Centre. On the 22nd July, in a "Personal and Confidential" letter to both Pandit Nehru, who in the meantime had succeeded Maulana Azad as the Congress President, and Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah, he set forth his formula for the same. It reiterated the assurance that "His Majesty's Government would treat the new Interim Government with the same close consultation and consideration as a Dominion Government," and "give to the Indian Government the greatest possible freedom in the exercise of the day to day administration of the country." Further, "it will (would) not be open to either Congress or the Muslim League to object to names submitted by the other party, provided they are (were) accepted by the Viceroy." This meant that Congress could now nominate one or more nationalist Muslims on the Interim Government—a point on which negotiations broke down in June. In all other respects the offer was the same as before.

Pandit Nehru informed the Viceroy in reply that the proposal in that form was not acceptable to the Congress. Their experience of the previous talks had demonstrated that there was little hope of a successful issue along the old lines of approach. They had all along attached the greatest importance to what they had called the "independence in action" of the Provisional Government. It was on the basis of "independence in action" and on that basis only, Pandit Nehru wrote, that a satisfactory approach to the problem could be made. The question of the status and power of the Provisional Interim Government had, therefore, to be decided first in unambiguous language. In view of all that, Pandit Nehru concluded, he was wholly unable to cooperate in the formation of a Government as suggested by the Viceroy.[2]

Nothing more followed from the Viceroy for a fortnight. But the "Direct Action" resolution which the Muslim League had passed in the meantime and withdrawal of its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission plan accomplished what Congress had failed so far to do. The reaction of the British Cabinet was reported to Gandhiji by a friend from London, in a letter in the first week of August:

> After Jinnah's threat (of Direct Action), the British Cabinet asked the Viceroy to send for Jinnah and tell Jinnah that if he was not prepared to play the game the British Cabinet had decided to hand over responsibility to the Congress and such other people as were prepared to work with them and to go ahead without Jinnah. The Viceroy pleaded that calling Jinnah immediately

after the threat would give an impression that the British were frightened by his threat and suggested not seeing Jinnah. The Cabinet agreed.

Jinnah's outburst has...given the Ministers as well as the administration here and in India the good shaking that they badly needed....Cabinet has decided that responsibility is to be made over to the Congress in the immediate future. Necessary instructions have been given to their representative. They, however, earnestly suggest to you that a final effort should be made to bring the League into the Government—if that is at all possible on just and reasonable terms. They realise that it is no use the Viceroy doing anything about it. They suggest that Congress President without waiting for an invitation and without standing on ceremony should take this job off the Viceroy's hands....If Mr. Jinnah refuses to cooperate and demands terms which Congress President cannot possibly accept, President should inform the Viceroy that he has done his best and it really is not possible to work with Mr. Jinnah....If President fails, Viceroy has instructions to ask him to help the Viceroy to get together a Government of representatives of Congress and other minorities....The Government that will thus come into existence will—technically—still be the Viceroy's Government, but Congress President will be *de facto* head of the Government and the Viceroy has instructions not to interfere....

Accordingly, on the 6th August, the Viceroy, acting under instructions from London, invited Pandit Nehru, the Congress President, to submit proposals for the formation of the Interim Government:

I have not sent you an answer to your letter of the 23rd July about the Interim Government. Subsequent developments make a new approach to the problem necessary. . . . I have decided with the concurrence of His Majesty's Government to invite you as President of the Congress to submit to me proposals for the formation of an Interim Government. . . . It will be for you to consider whether you should first discuss them with Mr. Jinnah; if you were able to reach an agreement with him, I should naturally be delighted.

That cleared the way for the Congress to accept the invitation. "We would have welcomed the formation of a Coalition Government with the Muslim League," wrote Pandit Nehru to the Viceroy on the 10th August. But in view of the resolution adopted by and the statements recently made on behalf of the Muslim League, it was not possible to expect that they would agree to cooperate at that stage. "Any premature attempt to induce them to do so might produce a contrary result. Such an attempt will inevitably become public and result in communal controversy and further delay which you rightly deprecate." The best course, Pandit Nehru suggested, would, therefore, be for the Viceroy to make a public announcement to the effect that he had invited the President of the Congress to form the Provisional Government and that the latter had accepted his invitation: "It will then be possible for us to approach the Muslim League and invite its cooperation. We

shall welcome that cooperation but, if this is denied us, we shall be prepared to go ahead without it."

The Viceroy accepted Pandit Nehru's suggestion and, on the 12th August, put out the necessary announcement. After the announcement, Pandit Nehru made another attempt to woo Jinnah. The reception he got from him was chilling. The Quaid-i-Azam's reply was in his choicest style:

Jinnah to Pandit Nehru 15th August, 1946

I know nothing as to what has transpired between the Viceroy and you; nor have I any idea of what arrangement has been arrived at between you two, except . . . that the Viceroy has invited you, in your capacity as the Congress President to make proposals for the immediate formation of the Interim Government and that you have accepted the invitation.

If this means that the Viceroy has commissioned you to form the Executive Council of the Governor-General and has already agreed to accept and act upon your advice and proceed to constitute his Executive accordingly, it is not possible for me to accept such position on that basis.

3

Hardly had the letter of invitation to Pandit Nehru left the Viceroy's desk, than it seems, he regretted his action. He even tried to recall his letter but was informed that it was too late. Thereafter, his own effort was concentrated on counteracting it by bringing the League into the Interim Government at any cost. The Calcutta Killing which followed a few days later utterly demoralised him. Even before Pandit Nehru could submit his list of names for the Government, he wanted to send for Jinnah on his own to persuade him to come into the Government. Perplexed, Pandit Nehru wrote on the 19th August:

When you wrote to me that you had decided, with the concurrence of the British Government, to invite me, as President of the Congress, to make proposals for the formation of an Interim Government, we accepted this invitation on the understanding that the responsibility would be ours. . . . I approached Mr. M. A. Jinnah and sought the cooperation of the Muslim League. Mr. Jinnah was not willing to cooperate with us. . . . We had then to proceed without him and the League. . . .

Your new proposal would change the whole approach to the problem and put an end to the responsibility which, at your suggestion, we had undertaken. We are now asked to revert to the previous stage which, we had thought, had finally ended after months of fruitless effort. . . .

It was when Jinnah himself cut the painter by his statement of 18th August that Lord Wavell gave in for the time being: "I have read the

statement by Mr. Jinnah in today's paper and in the present circumstances I agree that there would be no use in my sending for him."[3]

In submitting his proposals for the formation of the Interim Government, Pandit Nehru had pressed for the number of members in the new Cabinet to be raised to 15 for efficient discharge of functions, as also to enable a representative of the Anglo-Indian community to be included. But the Viceroy, again, while he saw the "advantage of having an Anglo-Indian representative in the Executive Council", objected to it on the ground that it would make the League's joining the Government more difficult, and "the matter of paramount importance is (was) to leave no stone unturned to get the Muslim League to join the Executive Council."[4] Pandit Nehru took strong exception to this as also to the Interim Government being referred to as the Executive Council. The new Government, though formed within the terms of the existing law, it was well recognised, was in nature and formation different from its predecessors; and in the invitation sent to the Congress and in the official announcement made in that behalf, it had been referred to as the "Interim Government". Why this reversion to the old designation? Was it again to please Jinnah?

Pandit Nehru to Lord Wavell 22nd August, 1946

I do not know what your conception is of the proposed Provisional Government. Is it going to be just another care taker government waiting and hoping for the Muslim League to walk in when it feels inclined to do so? That would simply mean an ineffective, unstable Government . . . which exists more or less on sufferance. . . . That might well lead to a worsening of the situation and possibly even to a repetition of the horrors of Calcutta. It is not for this that we would care to join the Provisional Government.

We do not believe that cooperation will come out of appeasement of wrong-doing. . . . The time will surely come when all of us, or most of us, will cooperate together. It will be retarded by wrong tactics and approaches. We may have rough weather ahead. We must have a strong and stable ship if we are to face it with confidence.

After the Great Calcutta Killing, Lord Wavell justified the *laissez faire* policy of the Central Government in regard to the Bengal Ministry, on the plea of Provincial autonomy. In his broadcast on the Interim Government, on the 24th August, he even went out of his way to give an assurance that his Government had no power nor any desire to trespass on the field of the Provincial administration. He now told the Congress leaders that the Congress should be prepared "in the interest of communal harmony" to reverse its previous decision in regard to the Provinces exercising option in the matter of joining groups and sections, and to accept the "intention" of the statement of 16th May. Not only that,

during his talks with the Congress leaders, he even held out the threat that if the Congress did not accept his formula, the Constituent Assembly might not be summoned. And all this was done in the name of "fair-play". A theory was developed, which found free vent in private conversations among the British higher officials, that the Muslim League being the "politically aggrieved party", indulgence in lawlessness on their part was not only "natural" and "condonable" but even became clothed with merit by reason of "elementary justice"!

Lord Wavell's formula ran:

The Congress are prepared in the interest of communal harmony to accept the intention of the statement of 16th May that Provinces cannot exercise any option affecting their membership of the sections or of the groups if formed until the decision contemplated in Para 19 (viii) of the statement of the 16th May is taken by the new legislature after the new constitutional arrangements have come into operation and the first general elections have been held.

Wrote Pandit Nehru to Lord Wavell on the 28th August:

In your broadcast on August 24th you refer to the Constituent Assembly and the question of grouping as follows: "I can assure the Muslim League that the procedure laid down in the statement of May 16th regarding the framing of Provincial and Group constitutions will be faithfully adhered to . . . and that the Congress are ready to agree that any dispute of interpretation may be referred to the Federal Court."

Thus what you said in your broadcast in this respect was in conformity with what we have ourselves said. What you now suggest . . . means that there should be no reference to the Federal Court of this particular matter, and that we should accept the interpretation put upon it by the Cabinet Mission and you, as distinguished from the legal interpretation which may be put upon it by the Federal Court. You stressed this and the need for communal harmony presumably because of what has happened in Calcutta. This approach is new. The Calcutta occurrences had taken place before your broadcast in which you have referred to the Federal Court deciding questions of interpretation.

All of us are extremely anxious to do everything in our power to promote communal harmony, but the way you suggest seems to us to lead to a contrary result. To change our declared policy, which is generally acknowledged to be fair, because of intimidation is surely not the way to peace. . . .

Your reference to the non-summoning of the Constituent Assembly, unless the course suggested by you was adopted by us, seemed to us extraordinary. . . . It is both a legal and moral obligation now to go on with the Constituent Assembly. . . . It cannot be held up because some people do not choose to join it and disturbances take place in the country. . . . If they refuse to join . . . the Constituent Assembly must proceed without them.

But with an ominous persistence Lord Wavell maintained that the problem was "not a legal one, but a practical one."[5] Master of his art

on the battle-field, when transferred to the arena of politics, Wavell reduced himself to the role of a benevolent, glorified game instructor, presiding over a children's game of leaden soldiers on a mimic battle-field. According to the rules of the game the field belongs to the side which wields the stronger punch. The legal and constitutional aspect did not enter into the soldier-statesman's mind. The Muslim League had the punch. Ergo, the field belonged to the League. The Congress must recognise that fact and "play the game":

Even if the Congress view in regard to the sections and grouping was referred to the Federal Court and accepted by it, the Congress would gain nothing. The Muslim League would inevitably refuse to take part and the progress of constitution-making would be held up, while communal stresses in the country would get worse and worse. I am sure that it would be unwise to call the Constituent Assembly till there is a firm agreed view on the grouping question.[6]

"I agree with you that the problem is not merely a legal one but a practical one," rejoined Pandit Nehru. "We have considered it in all its practical aspects. . . . If the Congress acted up to your present suggestion, many minorities would feel that we were ready to betray them and their interests because of pressure from some source. . . . If any change has to be made it should be through a recognised process, such as the one referred to by us, and not casually and over the heads of many people concerned. As regards the Constituent Assembly . . . an indefinite postponement of it would not only be wrong in principle but would have harmful practical results even from the point of view of our gaining cooperation of the Muslim League which we desire."[7]

Gandhiji read in these developments a danger signal and, on the 27th August, after an interview with the Viceroy, cabled a message to His Majesty's Government saying that the Viceroy was "unnerved owing to the Bengal tragedy" and needed to be assisted by "an abler and legal mind", otherwise "the repetition of the Bengal tragedy (was) a certainty." To the Viceroy, in a friendly letter he wrote:

Several times last evening you repeated that you were a "plain man and a soldier" and that you did not know the law. We are all plain men though we may not all be soldiers and even though some of us may know the law. It is our purpose, I take it, to devise methods to prevent a repetition of the recent terrible happenings in Calcutta. The question before us is how best to do it.

Your language last evening was minatory. As representative of the King you cannot afford to be a military man only, nor to ignore the law, much less the law of your own making. You should be assisted, if necessary, by a legal mind enjoying your full confidence. You threatened not to convene the Constituent Assembly, if the formula you placed before Pandit Nehru and me was not acted upon by the Congress. If such be really the case then you should not have made the announcement you did on 12th August (inviting the Congress

President to make proposals for the immediate formation of the Interim Government). But having made it you should recall the action and form another Ministry enjoying your full confidence. . . .

Referring to the Viceroy's argument that if the Constituent Assembly were called in the teeth of Muslim League's opposition, it would lead to further communal clashes necessitating the use of the British forces to suppress them, which H. M. G. wanted to avoid, he made it clear that India could very well do without the British forces, if only the British would let her alone:

If British arms are kept here for internal peace and order, your Interim Government would be reduced to a farce. The Congress cannot afford to impose its will on warring elements in India through the use of British arms. Nor can the Congress be expected to bend itself and adopt what it considers a wrong course because of the brutal exhibition recently witnessed in Bengal. Such submission would itself lead to an encouragement and repetition of such tragedies. *The vindictive spirit on either side would go deeper, biding for an opportunity to exhibit itself more fiercely and more disgracefully when occasion occurs. And all this will be chiefly due to the continued presence in India of a foreign power strong in and proud of its arms.* (Italics mine).

He requested the Viceroy to cable the whole text of his letter to the British Cabinet. This the latter did.

The full significance of Gandhiji's warning was not realised at that time either by the British Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for India. Mr. Attlee was perturbed by Gandhiji's warning. He was reported by a friend, who saw him, to have said that "if in Gandhi's judgment the situation is such that the Viceroy needs the assistance of a mind abler than his own and if Gandhi thinks that otherwise a repetition of the Calcutta tragedy is not only possible or probable but certain, then that is a matter which must be taken seriously." Mr. Attlee, however, hoped that the "abler and legal mind" recommended by Gandhiji might be provided by Pandit Nehru. Being however asked, whether this meant that Lord Wavell would accept whatever advice Pandit Nehru, as the Vice-President of the Interim Government might give to the Viceroy, he declined to commit himself. He admitted that there was a good case for a new Viceroy. His difficulty was to find a better man in Lord Wavell's place.

Lord Pethick-Lawrence, on the other hand, took up the attitude that the root of the trouble was the dissatisfaction of the Muslim League and the only remedy for it was for the Congress "who are now in a powerful position" to make some further concession, "which would induce Mr. Jinnah to come into the Government." The Congress people could not have it both ways, Lord Pethick-Lawrence said, claim maximum immunity from the operation of the reserve powers of the Viceroy

and the Provincial Governors and at the same time ask them to step in to exercise their extraordinary authority in Provincial matters, ask the British forces to quit and yet complain that they were not effectively employed to suppress disorders.

This would have been a perfectly logical position to take up and Gandhiji for one would have welcomed it as a very fair challenge, provided the British Government were ready to transfer full power to Indian hands and withdraw their forces from Indian soil with grace and goodwill. But while they continued to keep their army of occupation in India at India's expense and the Viceroy and the Governors retained their vast, extraordinary powers, the use they made of these powers largely was to maintain the *status quo* in parts of the country where the machinery of law and justice had broken down.

To give a few instances: In the first week of November, 1946, Sardar Patel and Liaquat Ali Khan saw the Viceroy together to secure some more help from the military for the riot-affected areas of Bihar. They did not get much but got a gratuitous sermon instead. The Interim Government felt helpless. The Provincial Governors said the same thing as the Viceroy—Indians must love one another. The Bombay Chief Minister, B. G. Kher, sent an S. O. S. over the telephone to Sardar Patel, which practically meant that the Governor of Bombay had given notice that military help would not be available in case there was serious communal trouble in the Province, and they must, therefore, cultivate friendly relations with the League, if they wanted to live in peace. The Bihar Chief Minister, Srikrishna Sinha, was similarly reported to have been told by Lord Wavell, when Lord Wavell visited Bihar after the Bihar disturbances, that in the matter of military help, the Viceroy had not to consider Bihar only but requirements of the whole of India. In practice this amounted to an ultimatum that the only way to secure peace and order in India was to concede the Muslim League's demand, irrespective of whether it was just or not.

The net effect of this policy was, on the one hand to put a premium upon organised hooliganism as an approved method of exerting political pressure, and on the other to foster among the people, who were likely to be the victims of hooliganism, a feeling that the only way to safeguard their lives and property and the honour of their womenfolk was to take the law into their own hands. And, as this could not be done effectively while Pax Britannica was clamped down upon them, the pent up passion of impotent rage brewed and brewed underground, biding its time, till suddenly released from external pressure it blew up with a fearful explosion.

4

The newly formed Interim Government had begun functioning efficiently as a team. The Ministers met together every day informally.

All important decisions were taken after mutual consultation and agreed decisions were placed before the Viceroy. The Viceroy, the permanent officials and particularly the Political Department found it difficult to adjust themselves to the new political climate.

Two members—Sir Shafat Ahmed Khan and Rajagopalachari—had been unable to take charge of their portfolios to begin with; the former owing to the murderous attack on him, and the latter owing to ill health. Similarly, some other members, too, had been unable to take charge immediately owing to various reasons. The Viceroy said that their portfolios should either remain vacant or revert to the Governor-General. Pandit Nehru protested:

I do not quite understand a portfolio remaining vacant or reverting to the Governor-General because a Member happens to be absent for a while. . . . The whole Cabinet is jointly responsible for major decisions. . . . If a Member is absent for a while, does this portfolio suddenly revert to the Governor-General and the sense of common responsibility in regard to it cease? . . . In such cases the obvious course appears to be that the portfolio should either be handled by some other member or by me as Vice-President. . . .

As you have yourself indicated, the present Council is different in nature and content from previous ones, there is a popular basis for it, and because of this you decided that secretaries of departments should not approach you directly but only through the Member. . . . Your alternative to this would be that a popular Government suddenly ceases to function in regard to some portfolios because one or more of the Members are absent for a while. . . . I do feel that the approach to this problem should be in line with the conception of a growth of popular Government under responsible Ministers.[8]

Again, Lord Wavell overruled the decision of the U. P. Ministry, when they wanted to remove their English Inspector-General of Police, who had defied their authority and of whose conduct they did not approve. This was in glaring contrast to what Lord Wavell had done after the Great Calcutta Killing. Obviously, Provincial autonomy meant one thing in Bengal and another in U. P. On another occasion, he insisted on giving preferment to a protege of his in a department which was under Sardar Patel, on the ground that the post in question was a "patronage post". The Sardar had to remind him that they were in any event going and such a step would be out of season in the new set-up.

The Private Secretary to the Viceroy issued a directive, the day the Interim Government was formed, that Members of the Government who might be visiting an Indian State were expected to give previous information of their visit to the Political Department. Also, that Members should avoid making speeches of a "political nature" in the Indian States. Pandit Nehru's patience snapped: "This appears to be an old convention. . . . I do not quite understand why we should function in

a State under the tutelage of the Political Department. . . . It will be more fitting if the Political Department brought itself in line with the present Government."[9]

The Political Department had it back on Pandit Nehru when the latter visited the Frontier Province in the middle of October. The Pathans accorded him a right royal welcome, but in the Malakand Political Agency, his car was ambushed by some tribesmen. The Political Department was suspected to have had a hand in the affair and action had to be taken against the political officer concerned for dereliction of duty.

Lord Wavell left the Interim Government not a moment's respite. On the 26th September, he invited Gandhiji to meet him. In the course of their meeting he again returned to his pet theme:

Viceroy: "The League must be brought in somehow."

Gandhiji: "The Congress is ready provided the League is willing to come in a straight way. Let Jinnah seek an interview with Pandit Nehru and come to an honourable understanding. It will be a great day if and when the Congress and the League come together in the Interim Government after a mutual understanding, without any mental reservations, and not to non-cooperate and fight."

Viceroy: "The only stumbling block is the inclusion of a nationalist Muslim in the Interim Government. The Congress has undoubted right to nominate a nationalist Muslim. But in view of the fact that Jinnah is obstinate on that point, where is the harm in waiving it?"

Gandhiji: "One may waive a right, one cannot waive a duty."

Viceroy: "But if the League refuses to come in, what happens to the Constituent Assembly?"

Gandhiji: "I admit that in that event the Constituent Assembly cannot properly meet. I must, however, make it clear that in this I represent nobody but myself."

Viceroy: "Let us pursue this line of thinking a little further. If the Constituent Assembly is not called, what happens next?"

Gandhiji: "The National Interim Government will carry on administration as it is doing at present. If you do not allow it to continue, you will expose your *bona fides* to suspicion."

Viceroy: "How can we do that?"

Gandhiji: "Then, do you want to retain power for yourself under this excuse? If you do that the whole world will condemn you. All you may insist on is that the Interim Government should include the Muslim League representatives. The Congress is prepared to do that."

Viceroy: "For that I shall need a mandate from the British Cabinet. I can only act according to my instructions. I admit that my sympathies are with the League. My endeavour to bring in the League will continue."

On the following day, Gandhiji addressed a letter to the Viceroy giving a gist of the conversation he had with him:

You were good enough to explain to me at length the result so far of your effort at peace-making between the Congress and the Muslim League. In the course of our conversation you told me that your leanings were towards the League. In your opinion there was left only one point of difference between the two parties, viz., the question of representation of a non-League Muslim out of the Congress quota. You recognised fully the reasonableness of the Congress position but you held that it would be an act of high statesmanship if the Congress waived the right for the sake of peace. I urged that if it was a question of waiving a right it would be a simple thing. It was a question of non-performance of a duty which the Congress owed to non-League Muslims. I entirely agreed with you on the proposition that it would be a great day if and when the Congress and the Muslim League came to a mutual understanding without reservations, mental or otherwise, and that it would be worse than useless if the two came together only with a view to fight each other. Moreover, I stressed the point that Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah should seek an interview with Pandit Nehru and try to come to an honourable understanding. If, however, the worst happened and the Muslim League boycott of the Constituent Assembly persisted and the British Government decided to discontinue the Constituent Assembly, I would hold it to be perfectly honourable. For, even though the Cabinet Mission had led one to suppose that they would continue the Constituent Assembly, I did not expect that they would or could continue it, in spite of the successful boycott by one of the major parties. You then interpolated the remark that there were three parties, not only two. The States were the third party. You added that if the boycott persisted you had grave doubts as to whether the States would come in.

Though I might be alone to hold the view, I said that I could not envisage the framing of a workable constitution if one of the two parties withheld cooperation and force had to be used to keep the boycotters under restraint.

You then asked me to work out the logical conclusion of the discontinuance of the Constituent Assembly and asked me what I thought of the Interim Government. I told you that I had little doubt that no matter what happened, the National Government, having been once summoned, should continue to function unless they themselves felt unable owing to their own incompetence or inability to do so. I added that the Congress had put up its very best men not at all in the spirit of gaining power for a party but in the spirit of selfless service of the whole nation. They were so considerate towards you and the League that they had hesitated to fill the two Muslim seats in the hope of the League coming into the Interim Government. You doubted if you could contemplate the continuance of the Interim Government and that in any case you were only a servant of the Crown and that you would have to take orders from His Majesty's Government. Whilst I appreciated your stand, I said the continuance of a *bona fide* National Government at the Centre was a vital

necessity and that any departure from it would lay the British people open to the gravest suspicion on the part of the people of India and would be a tragedy of the first magnitude.

The Viceroy denied that he had ever said that his leanings were towards the League. In some other respects, too, his recollection differed from Gandhiji's. But he declined to give his own version even when pressed: " I think it is unwise during negotiations like those now in progress to attempt to secure agreed minutes of conversations. It was decided not to do so during the Cabinet Mission's negotiations. . . . There are several other points which, if we had to reach agreement on the record, I should have to suggest changing."[10] Lord Wavell's letter ended with: "I hope you will use your influence for a settlement."

Gandhiji accepted the repudiation, but how was he to fulfil the Viceroy's hope that he (Gandhiji) should "use his influence for a settlement", if the Viceroy did not help him to understand fully and correctly his (Viceroy's) mind?

Gandhiji to Lord Wavell 28th September, 1946

As the conversation between us turned out to be important, as I conceived it, I thought I would let you have my impressions so that you could correct me if I had erred. For I had to report the purport of our conversation to Pandit Nehru and other friends. Even during the Cabinet Mission's negotiations I had sent to Lord Pethick-Lawrence or Sir Stafford Cripps, as the case may be, my impressions of our talks and this was beneficial. As for your correction, of course, I accept it unhesitatingly. But my impression definitely was that at the very outset of your description of what had happened between you and Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah, I understood you to say that although in some of his presentations he was unreasonable your leanings were towards the Muslim League. But after your correction my impression loses all its value.

I would like to have your other corrections also if you have the time. Although we may never make public use of our conversations I have found, throughout my 55 years' stormy public life, written records of inestimable value for promoting mutual understanding and further conversation. But, of course, I am in your hands in this matter and your wishes shall prevail, for I want to fulfil your "hope" that I should "use" my "influence for a settlement". For this cause, which I have at heart, I would naturally ever want to understand you correctly and fully if only because, of all the persons in India, you enjoy a unique position.

But Lord Wavell was not prepared to give up his "principle" of not having agreed minutes: " I quite see your point about securing an accurate record, but I would prefer to stick to the principle of not having agreed minutes of personal discussions during these negotiations, and I will not, therefore, comment further on your first letter. I am very glad to hear that you will use your great influence for a settlement."[11]

The fact was that the pro-League section of British officials felt that their protege, the Muslim League, had overplayed its cards by remaining out of the Interim Government, and they were determined to bring it in at any price. To that end the Viceroy and his group now opened negotiations with the Muslim League on their own.

5

On the 4th October, 1946, a copy of Jinnah's nine demands as the basis of the League's joining the Interim Government and Lord Wavell's reply thereto was handed to Pandit Nehru by the Viceroy. The main issues were:

(1) The Muslim League, while agreeing to the sixth nominee of the Congress being a representative of the Scheduled Castes, in the Interim Government of 14 members, contended that the ultimate responsibility in that behalf was with the Governor-General, and that it must not be taken that the Muslim League had agreed to, or approved of, the selection of the Scheduled Castes representative that had been made. Lord Wavell's comment on it was: "I note what you say and accept that the responsibility is mine."

(2) The Muslim League's demand for alternative or rotational Vice-President, from the two major communities, and the Viceroy's offer that he would, in view of the practical difficulties involved in it, instead, "arrange to nominate a Muslim League member to preside over the Cabinet in the event of the Governor-General and the Vice-President being absent." And further that he would "nominate" a Muslim League member as Vice-Chairman of the Co-ordination Committee of the Cabinet, "which is a most important post. I am Chairman of this Committee and in the past have presided almost invariably, but I shall probably do so only on special occasions."

(3) The right claimed by the Muslim League to be consulted in the selection of the minority representatives, i.e., Sikh, Indian Christian and Parsi, and the Viceroy's assurance in that behalf that both the major parties would be consulted before filling in any vacancy that might occur in any of those seats.

(4) The right of veto in regard to decisions on all major communal issues in the Interim Government claimed by the Muslim League, to which the Viceroy had replied that since a Coalition Government either "works by a process of mutual adjustment or does not work at all", all differences would be resolved "in advance of Cabinet meetings by friendly discussions".

The Viceroy "agreed", too, as regards the Muslim League's demands that the total number of the members in the Interim Government should not exceed 14; that the major portfolios should be equally distributed between the Congress and the League; and that the proposed arrangements should not be changed or modified without the consent of both the major parties. Jinnah further wanted that the question of the settlement of the long term plan should stand over "until a

better and more conducive atmosphere" had been created and an Interim Government had been "reformed and finally set up" by a settlement of the outstanding issues. But, Lord Wavell's reply on that score was clear and unequivocal: "Since the basis for participation in the Cabinet is, of course, acceptance of the statement of the 16th May, I assume that the League Council will meet at a very early date to reconsider its Bombay resolution." Nor could the Viceroy accept Jinnah's demand that the Congress should not include in "the remaining five members of their quota a Muslim of their choice". But, his ground of rejection was that "each party must be equally free to nominate its own representatives". The Muslim League promptly took advantage of it by including in its quota a representative of the Scheduled Castes.

Pandit Nehru replied to the Viceroy the same day, giving his reactions:

(1) Mr. Jinnah mentions that the six nominees of the Congress will include one Scheduled Caste representative. And yet he says further on that "it must not be taken that the Muslim League has agreed to, or approves of, the selection of the Scheduled Caste representative." I do not see how the question of agreement or approval by the Muslim League arises in regard to the nominees of the Congress. . . . It is true that legally and constitutionally speaking the ultimate responsibility for the appointment of Members rests with the Governor-General. But it was understood that the legal responsibility should be exercised on the advice of the person charged with forming the Government. . . .

(2) I am personally agreeable . . . to a Muslim League Member being chosen as Vice-Chairman of the Co-ordination Committee of the Cabinet. . . .

I feel, however, that your answer to this question introduces a new element which creates a difficulty. You say that you will arrange to *nominate* a Muslim League Member to preside over the Cabinet in the event of the Governor-General and the Vice-President being absent. I think that any such nomination by you would neither be constitutional nor otherwise desirable. This, however, can be done by *agreement* between us. . . . (Italics mine).

(3) If we function as a Cabinet, as we must, the whole Cabinet should be consulted before any decision is arrived at. Naturally, the major parties would confer together. . . . It would seriously interfere with the Cabinet system, and the growth of the convention that Cabinet advice should be accepted, if the Governor-General consulted each group or individual Members separately and then came to his own decision in the matter.

(4) What I have stated above flows from the acceptance of the principle of Cabinet responsibility and the Governor-General's acceptance of Cabinet recommendations. . . . Our whole objective must necessarily be for the Cabinet to function together and not to be treated as consisting of separate groups which can be consulted separately as groups, thus putting an end to the

cohesion and sense of joint responsibility in the Cabinet. Naturally, as you have pointed out . . . a Coalition Government either works by a process of mutual adjustments or does not work at all. . . . We have adopted the practice of meeting daily in informal Cabinet meetings to consider not only the formal Cabinet agendas but also all important matters relating to any Department. Thus, any important decision, to whatever Department it might relate, is considered by us jointly and actually becomes a joint decision as well as a joint responsibility. This avoids grouping within the Cabinet and at the same time helps in evolving an integrated solution or decision. If any procedure is adopted which encourages group functioning within the Cabinet and encourages separate groups to function separately, this would seriously militate against the whole conception of Cabinet Government which we are seeking to evolve and which we have already succeeded in evolving in a large measure during the past month.

The only assurance that Lord Wavell could give in answer to this was contained in his laconic note dated 5th October: "As you know, I wish to encourage union in the Cabinet in every way. I am most anxious that the Cabinet should work as a team and I hope we shall be able to achieve this."

While the Congress, thus, attached the greatest importance to the Cabinet functioning as a team with joint responsibility, and to the Governor-General acting on the advice of the Cabinet, it was clear that the Viceroy looked upon himself as the *de facto* executive head, with the prerogative among other things of an umpire and final court of appeal to intervene and keep the balance even among the various parties in the Interim Government during the transitional period. He could never wholly shed that assumption. From it stemmed all their differences. It encouraged the League's intransigence and took away all incentive on its part to seek agreement with the Congress.

In the meantime the Nawab of Bhopal had entered the arena. He had for long enjoyed very cordial relations with Gandhiji. On the 1st October, he saw Gandhiji and discussed with him a formula, the substance of which was that since the Muslim League had swept the polls at the recent elections, so far as the Muslim seats were concerned, the Congress should recognise that, in the circumstances, according to the *democratic principle* the Muslim League *alone* had the right to represent the Muslims of India *in general*, provided that by the same token the League did not question the right of the Congress to represent all others, including such Muslims as had thrown in their lot with the Congress; and to choose such representatives for the Government as it might think proper from amongst them. This clearly meant that the Congress could nominate all the minority seats and also nationalist Muslims, and the League could claim no veto in regard to the filling up of the vacancies that might occur in the Interim Government outside its own quota.

Of course, anything was possible by mutual agreement. If the League nominees worked together with the Congress as a team, as was clearly contemplated, all decisions would be taken after joint consultation and there would be no difference left.

All this was made very clear and was agreed to during the talks with the Nawab of Bhopal, and Gandhiji was under the impression that it was set down explicitly in the formula to which he had agreed. The formula was finally drafted and Gandhiji put his signature to it, on the 4th October, without having a final look at the document, fancying that the things he had in mind were there in black and white when, as a matter of fact, they were not. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and myself pressed him to have another look at the document before signing it. But time was short and Gandhiji was terribly overstrained. He lightly brushed aside our suggestion, saying he was sure he could safely place himself in the Nawab's hands. The Nawab would never let him down.

The formula was in two parts:

I. The Congress does not challenge and accepts that the Muslim League now is the authoritative representative of an overwhelming majority of the Muslims of India. As such and in accordance with democratic principles they alone have today an unquestionable right to represent the Muslims of India. But the Congress cannot agree that any restriction or limitation should be put upon the Congress to choose such representatives as they think proper from amongst the members of the Congress as their representatives.

II. It is understood that all the Ministers of the Interim Government will work as a team for the good of the whole of India and will never invoke the intervention of the Governor-General in any case.

Jinnah while agreeing to the first part said that, so far as he was concerned, the second part would require further consideration and discussion. The value of the formula in Gandhiji's eyes, however, lay in the second part, as it would enable the Indian question to be taken completely out of the hands of the third party and settled by mutual understanding among the Indians themselves. He told the Nawab of Bhopal that his acceptance of Part I was conditional on Jinnah's agreeing to the formula as a whole.

Members of the Working Committee did not like the wording of the formula. They felt they could not commit themselves to it unless certain things were made more explicit. They proposed that Part I of the formula should be modified by the addition of the following: "For identical reasons the League recognises the Congress as the authoritative organisation representing all non-Muslims and such Muslims as have thrown in their lot with the Congress."

That made Gandhiji prick up his ears. "But all that is there in black and white in the formula," he exclaimed. This was on the afternoon of the 4th October. The Working Committee dispersed soon after.

Everybody was in a hurry for one reason or another. The evening was packed with dove-tailing engagements, which left Gandhiji not a free moment. As soon as he was able to be by himself, he sent for the text of the formula and discovered the "Homeric" nod into which he had betrayed himself. It was then ten o'clock at night. He immediately sent me to the Nawab of Bhopal with the message that he had discovered his mistake, for which the primary and ultimate responsibility should be deemed to be his (Gandhiji's). He would take the odium and even retire from public life as a penalty, if necessary, but he could not be guilty of betraying the Congress by asking the Working Committee to accept the formula as it stood.

The Working Committee, however, decided for the sake of an agreement with the League to accept both parts of Gandhiji's formula as it stood and communicated the same to Jinnah. On the 5th October, Pandit Nehru had a very full and, as he fancied, friendly talk with Jinnah at the Nawab of Bhopal's residence and again on the 7th. But on the 7th October, he was surprised to receive a letter from Jinnah, which was not only at variance with the spirit and drift of their whole talk but Jinnah had appended to it an exact copy of his 9-point demand which he had addressed to the Viceroy, and which the Viceroy in his letter of the 4th October had conceded in part. But whereas the Congress was prepared to concede the substance of those points on the Muslim League agreeing to the second part of Gandhiji's formula and coming to an agreement with the Congress, the Viceroy had conceded the same without any such condition.

Gandhiji had always shown readiness to accept less as a result of a direct settlement with the League than more at the hands of the British Power. Jinnah, finding that no more could be extracted from the Congress, preferred to have the same at the hands of the Viceroy without coming to any agreement with the Congress. On the 15th October, it was announced that the Muslim League had agreed to enter the Interim Government at the Viceroy's invitation. Its nominees virtually became the "King's party" in the reformed Interim Government, with the Viceroy as their leader.

The Congress effort to arrive at a just understanding with the Muslim League was thus torpedoed. To Indian experience this was nothing new. Sir Samuel Hoare had done exactly the same in an even more blatant form in 1932. (See page 75). No matter how generous and accommodating the Congress tried to be, the third party could always afford to be more generous at India's expense.

6

Gandhiji's worst fears came true almost immediately. On being informed by the Viceroy of the Muslim League's decision to come into

the Interim Government, Pandit Nehru wrote to Lord Wavell on the 14th October:

It is important for us to understand exactly how he proposes to join. . . The offer you made . . . was that five places . . . could be taken by the Muslim League (and) . . . you made it clear that a Coalition Government must necessarily work as a team and not as a joining together of rival groups which did not cooperate for a common purpose (and) . . . *the basis for participation in the Cabinet must . . . be presumed to be the acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's statement of 16th May.* (Italics mine).

Jinnah's letter itself accepting the Viceroy's offer of five seats in the Interim Government was couched in terms of a general disapproval of the "basis and scheme of setting up the Interim Government" and repudiation of "the decision already made"—a strange prelude to joining the Government "with the intention of co-operating" ! It gave an indication of the shape of things to come. The same was reflected in the League's choice of names. Sharing his misgivings with the Viceroy, Pandit Nehru wrote:

We have not raised any objection to the names proposed on behalf of the Muslim League. . . . But I think I owe it to you to tell you privately and personally that I regret deeply the choice which the Muslim League has made. That choice itself indicates a desire to have conflict rather than to work in co-operation.[12]

Four days later, Ghazanfar Ali Khan, one of the Muslim League nominees for the Interim Government, delivered a speech before the students at Lahore which left no doubt as to the Muslim League's intention in coming into the Interim Government. Describing the Interim Government as "one of the fronts of the Direct Action campaign" in the course of his remarks, he said: "We are going into the Interim Government to get a foot-hold to fight for our cherished goal of Pakistan. . . . The Interim Government is one of the fronts of the Direct Action campaign." This was a wholly untenable position. Even if the issue of Pakistan was to be fought out, the proper place for it was the Constituent Assembly and not the Interim Government. The function of the Interim Government was to carry on the administration of the country effectively, efficiently and impartially, while the new constitution was being hammered out.

Pandit Nehru left Delhi for a tour of the Frontier Province soon after. The draft of a letter to the Viceroy which Gandhiji prepared for Sardar Patel in Pandit Nehru's absence on the 20th October, ran:

Is the Interim Government to be the arena of party politics and intrigues and for driving in the very partition wedge which the long-term arrangement has withdrawn once for all and replaced it by grouping? . . .

It seems to be quite clear that *before the coalition comes into being* and portfolios are re-distributed, besides the withdrawal of the speech in question (Ghazanfar Ali's speech), there should be a clear announcement by the Council of the League accepting the long-term arrangement, and the text of the resolution of the Working Committee of the League should be supplied to the present members of the Cabinet. (Italics mine).

I am sure you will yourself recognise the necessity of the foregoing requirements if the Interim Government is to run well and the present trouble is to subside.

But neither the speech of Ghazanfar Ali Khan was withdrawn nor did the League Council meet and accept the Cabinet Mission's Plan. On his return from the Frontier tour, Pandit Nehru again wrote to the Viceroy, on the 23rd October, reminding him about the basis on which Congress had agreed to Muslim League's entering the Interim Government:

You know how arguments and difficulties have arisen in the past over any matter left vague. It would be exceedingly unfortunate if we did not clarify the position completely before starting this new experiment. . . .

In my correspondence with you and in your letter addressed to me as well as to Mr. Jinnah *it was made clear that the Muslim League's joining the Interim Government meant inevitably their acceptance of the long-term scheme*. . . . A formal decision of the Muslim League to this effect would have to be taken by the Council of the League as they had originally passed the resolution of non-acceptance. Nevertheless, it was made clear that the Working Committee of the League would itself recommend the acceptance of this scheme and the formality could follow soon after. It was on this basis that we proceeded. (Italics mine).

Now it is by no means clear what the position of the Muslim League is in regard to the long-term arrangement. . . . So far as we know, the Council of the Muslim League (has not) been convened. . . . I was told (by the Viceroy during the talk on the previous day) that Mr. Jinnah wanted certain assurances. This means that even Mr. Jinnah and his Working Committee have not agreed to accept the statement of May 16th unless something further happens. . . .

Pandit Nehru asked for two points to be cleared up before allotment of portfolios could be made. The second step could not be taken before the first, which would be governed by it. These two points were: (1) The League must accept the long-term plan and a date should be fixed for the League Council's meeting, and (2) it should be made clear whether the approach of the League to the Interim Government was that embodied in the speeches of Ghazanfar Ali Khan and Liaquat Ali Khan: "This is all the more necessary because the Muslim League is not joining the Government after an agreement with the Congress. . . . The very least that we can expect is a clear statement from the Muslim

League of their intention in joining the Interim Government and their acceptance of the long-term plan."[13]

It seems strange that each time the Congress leaders asked the Viceroy for a clear statement from the League that it had accepted the long-term plan before coming into the Interim Government, the Viceroy passed on to them, instead, an unsigned cheque on behalf of the League and they were content to accept it without caring to examine whether it was properly endorsed or not.

Lord Wavell to Pandit Nehru 23rd October, 1946

I have made it clear to Mr. Jinnah . . . that the Muslim League's entry into the Interim Government is conditional on the acceptance of the scheme of . . . May 16th . . . and that he must call his Council at an early date to agree to this.

As I have told you, Mr. Jinnah has assured me that the Muslim League will come into the Interim Government and the Constituent Assembly with the intention of cooperating.

"I am glad," Pandit Nehru wrote back, "that Mr. Jinnah has assured you that the Muslim League is coming into the Interim Government and Constituent Assembly with the intention of cooperating . . . (and) that . . . the Muslim League's entry into the Interim Government is conditional on the acceptance of the scheme of the Cabinet Delegation . . . of May 16th. *While you have made this clear to Mr. Jinnah, it is not equally clear what the Muslim League's view is on this subject.*"[14] (Italics mine).

Before setting out on his Frontier tour, Pandit Nehru had a meeting with the Viceroy on the 15th October. The latter's main anxiety seemed to be about "equitable" allotment of portfolios between the Congress and the League. Pandit Nehru put forth some difficulties on the Congress side about accepting the Viceroy's proposal in regard to the reshuffle in the course of a note which he addressed to him the same day. He further told him that while three nominees of the Congress would tender their resignation to make room for the League nominees (two Muslim seats had already been kept vacant for the League by the Congress) and an announcement to that effect could be made immediately, the actual reshuffle and the details of re-allotment should be postponed till after his return from his Frontier tour.

But while Lord Wavell took it easy in the matter of implementation by the League of the conditions attaching to its coming into the Interim Government, he was insistent almost to the point of discourtesy towards his colleagues as regard the allotment of portfolios: "As I informed you," he wrote to Pandit Nehru on the 23rd October, "I consider that the Muslim League are entitled to one out of the three following portfolios: External Affairs, Home and Defence. I would be grateful if you would let me know which of these portfolios you advise should be

given to the Muslim League." This insistence in spite of Pandit Nehru's telling him that "it would be improper to change the three portfolios" was the limit. "We feel," Pandit Nehru replied on the same day, "that it would be an entirely wrong step, leading to most unfortunate consequences, if any change was made in the portfolios of Defence and Home." In fact Pandit Nehru even told the Viceroy that the Sardar would rather resign than continue in the Cabinet if his portfolio was tampered with: "Whatever might have been done at the time of the formation of the Government if the Muslim League had then come in, at the present moment to ask Sardar Patel to leave his portfolio would be an act of extreme discourtesy to him. He has been made a special target of attack by the official organ of the Muslim League and it becomes, therefore, still more unbecoming for us to ask him to leave this portfolio. Indeed, I do not think he will care to remain in the Government if he is asked to do so."[15]

After all that had happened in Calcutta and East Bengal (See Chapter XI), and more so after Liaquat Ali Khan's speech and that of Ghazanfar Ali, handing over of either of the above two portfolios to the Muslim League would have created a psychological upheaval all over the country. "In regard to the portfolio of External Affairs, some similar considerations arise, especially after my recent visit to the Tribal areas and my experience there which have powerfully affected people all over the country."[16] Moreover, "it seems to us essential that even before the question of portfolios is considered, other matters should be cleared up."[17] Finally, on the 24th October, Pandit Nehru wrote to the Viceroy:

I have consulted my colleagues. . . . We cannot continue in the Government if a decision is imposed upon us against our will. . . . We would not have attached importance to the allocation of portfolios but for the implications and circumstances which I have already mentioned and which compel us to do so.

Two months ago I was asked to form the Interim Government and I undertook the responsibility. This was done as a result of all the talks and negotiations which preceded it with the concurrence of H.M.G. Now that a crisis has arisen which is leading to our resignation and termination of this Government, I think H.M.G. should be informed of all the developments.

Lord Wavell was not prepared for this. His only desire was to bring in the League. So he capitulated on the question of portfolios and the Congress continued in office. But on other points the Congress failed to carry its insistence to its logical conclusion. In terms of power politics it was perhaps a triumph for the Congress. The Congress leaders felt that retention of certain portfolios gave them a political advantage which they could ill afford to lose. It cost them dear. With Gandhiji it was the other way about. He put fundamental principles first. There was in fact

a much stronger case for resignation on other issues, which turned upon a fundamental principle. If they had done so, the Viceroy would have had to yield and the League would have come in only as a result of an agreement with the Congress. Even otherwise, the Congress would have been the gainer in the long run. As it was, the Muslim League entered the Interim Government and stayed there without giving a clear undertaking that it had accepted the long-term plan. The result was a tragedy.

7

Taken by itself, the entry of the League into the Interim Government would have been hailed as the proverbial silver lining to an otherwise dark cloud. But the manner of their coming robbed it of all potentiality for good and converted it into a tactic of doubtful morality. Gandhiji, as we have seen, had all along questioned the right of the League to include anyone except the Muslims in its list of nominees, as its door was closed to all non-Muslims. But the Congress leaders from their purely political angle seemed to have regarded this as matter of mere detail. Gandhiji had insisted, and it had been agreed in the Working Committee, that this was to be treated as a vital issue. But this point was not pressed sufficiently by the Congress leaders with the result that Jinnah was able to obtain a written guarantee from Lord Wavell that the League were at liberty to nominate anyone they wished in their quota of seats. Their nominees included four Muslims and, to everybody's surprise, one Scheduled Caste—Jogendranath Mandal from Bengal.

He had hoped, commented Gandhiji in his prayer discourse of the 16th October, "that the coming of the Muslim League into the Interim Government would prove to be a good augury." A man like himself, he observed, they might say, ought to be glad that another seat had been given to a Harijan. But he would be deceiving himself and Jinnah Saheb if he said so. The latter had said that the Muslims and Hindus were two nations; the League was a purely Muslim communal organisation. "How then could they nominate a Harijan to represent them?" He feared that their whole mode of entering into the Cabinet had not been straight.

By bartering the moral basis for the political, the Congress leaders lost the one vantage ground which they held, viz., the moral. It led to a whole series of surrenders on their part and finally to surrender on the issue of undivided India itself. The League continued to use Jogendranath Mandal against the Congress and later against Gandhiji's peace mission in Noakhali, till four years afterwards, humiliated and disillusioned by the treatment accorded by his new masters to the minorities, including his own community in Pakistan, he himself had to flee and take shelter as a refugee with thousands of others, in the Indian Union.

The most amazing part of the whole business was that the Muslim League was brought in by the Viceroy without first obtaining from the League in writing a formal reversal of its decision about Direct Action and its acceptance of the 16th May plan. He depended upon a verbal assurance instead, which, he said, he had received from Jinnah and which Jinnah later categorically repudiated. The explanation given by Sir Stafford Cripps in March, 1947, in the House of Commons, of the imbroglio was that since Muslim League representatives had been invited to join the Viceroy's executive on the basis of the League's taking part in the Constituent Assembly, "it was assumed by those concerned that as they (the Muslim League) had not repudiated it, they would be bound by it." But, Jinnah, it seems, held with Sir Hudibras that,

> He that imposes an oath makes it,
> Not he that for convenience takes it;
> Then how can any man be said
> To break an oath he never made?

If those concerned allowed themselves to be deceived by trusting blindly, they had only themselves to blame. *Caveat emptor*—let the buyer beware! Jinnah was at last quits with the Cabinet Mission. On the 21st November, 1946, he issued a directive that "no representative of the Muslim League will participate in the Constituent Assembly, and the Bombay resolution of the Muslim League Council passed on 29th July (withdrawing its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan) stands."

It was well known that H. M. G. wanted the Nehru Ministry to be allowed to function as a *de facto* Cabinet. If the Muslim League had come into the Interim Government on Pandit Nehru's invitation, as it should have in the normal course, it would have come as a result of a satisfactory understanding with the Congress, and the result would have been a harmonious and fruitful functioning of the coalition. Intervention by the third party introduced into the Interim Government a group of avowed saboteurs. They straightaway proceeded to repudiate the principle of collective responsibility, the League Ministers took all matters pertaining to their departments directly to the Viceroy over the head of Pandit Nehru, and converted the Interim Government into an arena of communal conflict. Observed Ispahani, "personal envoy" of Jinnah to the United States, in a broadcast address at the Forum: "The League has come into the Government . . . principally to retrieve the machinery of Government, at least partially, from the monopolistic control of its political opponents. The League's participation in the new Government . . . only means that the struggle for Pakistan will now be carried on within as well as without the Government."[18] They should be there, said Jinnah, as "sentinels" of exclusive Muslim interests. Ghazanfar Ali Khan even expressed satisfaction at the orgy of violence that had been let loose on the country: "The disturbances which

have occurred in many parts of the country after the installation of the purely Congress Government at the Centre have established the fact . . . that ten crores of Indian Muslims will not submit to any Government which does not include their true representatives."[19] And so, the very people who had avowed their intention to unleash violence in the country assumed the reins of power in the Interim Government.

On the day when the Muslim League was admitted into the Interim Government on the Viceroy's initiative and invitation, the battle of undivided India was irretrievably lost. His Majesty's Government had issued clear instructions that Pandit Nehru having been asked to form the Interim Government, further steps for bringing in the League should be left, on the analogy of the Cabinet system, entirely to him. Some members of the Cabinet Mission were reported to have expressed surprise afterwards when they learnt that it had been brought in by the Viceroy instead. How it happened then, and how the Congress acquiesced in such a procedure, are questions for the future historian to unravel.

As part of the "Direct Action within the Government", the Muslim League nominees began systematically to put Muslims of their choice into all key positions in departments under them, and the Cabinet Secretariat was honeycombed with "cells". The sympathisers and agents of the Muslim League in the Government acted as the "fifth column" and sabotaged the unity and efficient functioning of the administration. Thus, the very catastrophe against which Gandhiji had warned the Cabinet Delegation and which the latter had, at last, made up their mind to avoid, viz., to produce an incompatible mixture by forcing upon the country a Government of their own choice, was ultimately brought about by the policy pursued by the Viceroy and the British officials.

8

"Independence of India" was a common term between the Viceroy—as representing the British side—the Congress and the Muslim League. But it had a different connotation for each and in that context became a baffling ambiguous middle. To the British, it meant that legal independence had to come after certain conditions, which they had laid down, were fulfilled. Till then the British troops would remain in occupation of India, enforcing the British will on both the parties. To the Muslim League, independence meant partition of the country first and independence for the two parts and the two "Indian nations" afterwards. To the Congress, independence meant the independence of India unconditionally and as a whole, including that portion which was ruled by the Princes.

It has been argued on behalf of Lord Wavell that he favoured the unity of India and Jinnah detested him on that account. May be. Even

so had Lord Linlithgow talked about the "geographical unity" of India, and Sir Samuel Hoare and the British conservatives before him. But their India was an India made safe for British interests, the British proteges and the British Commonwealth. If the whole of India could not be secured on those terms, they were determined that India should be partitioned.

After the Cabinet Mission's first series of interviews with the Indian leaders, on the 25th April, 1946, Mr. A. V. Alexander, in the course of an informal conference among themselves, expressed the fear that it would be difficult to obtain in an undivided India sufficient protection for the Muslims. Sir William Croft thereupon suggested that if the Congress did not agree to an Interim Government under the existing constitution, the British Government should form a medium Pakistan, leaving out Ambala Division of the Punjab and West Bengal only from what Jinnah demanded. The British should evacuate from the rest of India and *stay in Pakistan by agreement*. The Viceroy appeared not to rule out such a possibility.

Jinnah exasperated them at times. He was their *enfant terrible*. He gave them many a headache, still he was their pet; their attitude towards him was that of an indulgent parent towards a spoilt child. Lord Wavell had persuaded himself that "justice" was on the side of the League and if they could only bring the League into the Government—no matter how or at what price—it would save India from bloodshed. That policy cost India more in carnage, bloodshed and experience of subhuman bestiality than a major battle. In November, 1946, the Under Secretary of State for India announced in the House of Commons that as a result of communal fighting in India between 1st July and 30th October, even according to official reports, 5,018 people had been killed and 13,320 injured exclusive of those who were killed or injured during the carnage in East Bengal and later in Bihar.

A man of great dignity—tight-lipped, straightforward, warm-hearted—"guinea-a-word Wavell", as he was affectionately nicknamed, Lord Wavell was altogether a lovable personality. His sincerity was beyond question. No doubt he, too, wanted in his own way to help India on the road to freedom. He had a wonderful loyalty which on more than one occasion made him take upon his shoulders other people's blame, and a blunt soldierly manner which was very endearing. But he totally lacked historical sense and imagination, and his soldier's single-track mind understood little and cared less for legal and constitutional proprieties. They appeared to confuse and sometimes even to irritate him. The British officials in India made the fullest use of his goodness as well as his limitations to further their own plans. The result was a tragedy the like of which India had not known before and which ultimately necessitated his recall.

CHAPTER XI

THE STORM BURSTS

1

THE "DIRECT ACTION" programme of the Muslim League in Calcutta had misfired. It had recoiled on the heads of those who had launched it. The cry went forth: "Calcutta must be avenged." Hell broke loose in Noakhali on the 10th October, 1946, but for nearly a week the world outside was permitted to know nothing about it.

Geologically speaking the youngest district in the Gangetic delta, Noakhali constitutes the south-western part of the Chittagong Division in East Bengal. The principal crops are rice, jute, coconut and betel-nut. There is a heavy rainfall. An intricate net work of *khals* or canals covers the whole district and provides a cheap means of transport for six months in the year. Other communications are bad. Rail links are few and far between and even good motorable roads are a rarity. The scenery is gorgeous. The whole landscape presents a smiling garden-like appearance. The tops of densely-growing coconut and betel-nut trees, rising to stately heights almost meet overhead, forming a natural umbrella through which even the midday sun scarcely penetrates. Buried in the thick mango woods the cuckoo fills their sultry silence with its feverish, plaintive call. Plaintain and papaya, lichi and pineapple, luscious jack-fruit and mango, and coconut with its cooling, refreshing milk—not to mention citrus—grow in abundance and are within almost everybody's reach. There is an endless variety of pot-herbs and vegetables, unrivalled in size and flavour that can be grown with the minimum of labour, and about half a dozen varieties of roots and tubers practically growing wild. Tanks abound in fish and lotuses of many hues while patches of bright heavens mirrored in the molten glass of the water-filled jute-fields and fringed by countless reflections of greenish, straight-growing, translucent jute-stems under the cloudless autumnal skies, present a vision of ravishing beauty which once seen can never be forgotten.

But behind this enchanting facade of nature lurks danger. The hamlets are widely scattered and isolated from one another by thick jungle-growth, tall-growing jute-fields and countless water-channels. A cry of distress even in the daytime is lost in the impenetrable solitude of the echoing woods that surround the hamlets, whilst the dense, interlacing vegetation and innumerable tanks and *khals* jammed with water hyacinth provide an ideal cover for the blackest of deeds.

On the 14th October, the day before the Muslim League's entry in the Interim Government was announced, the following Press note was released by the Bengal Press Advisory Committee:

Reports of organised hooliganism in the district of Noakhali have reached Calcutta. Riotous mobs with deadly weapons are raiding villages, and looting, murder and arson are continuing since . . . October 10, on a very large scale. Forcible mass conversion, abduction of women and desecration of places of worship are also reported.

Areas affected so far are reported to be over 200 square miles of the Sadar and Feni sub-divisions. Approaches to the affected areas are being guarded by armed hooligans.

Among the large number of people reported to be murdered or burnt alive are the President of the District Bar with family, and a prominent zamindar of the district.

Inquiries at official sources in Calcutta reveal that military and armed police have been rushed to the affected areas, which comprise the entire Ramganj, parts of Begamganj, Lakshmipur, Raipur, Senbagh, Feni, Chagalanaiya and Sandwip *thanas*.

According to another message, all ingress and egress of the persecuted people to and from the affected areas, was completely stopped and all approaches to these areas were closely guarded "by hooligans, armed with deadly weapons". The telegram also referred to "the planned organisation behind this terrible carnage, arson and loot."[1]

Admitting "very serious oppression" in Noakhali, Shaheed Suhrawardy, the Chief Minister of Bengal, at a Press conference on the 16th October at Calcutta, stated that it had become somewhat difficult for the troops "to move in the affected areas as canals had been dammed, bridges damaged and roads blocked." That was why a "very high ranking" military officer had been sent there. In addition to rushing more battalions, if needed, to the affected areas, he said, it was contemplated to drop from the air "printed appeal and warning" to the people to stop these things. The Chief Minister also stated that the situation in Noakhali was extremely bad and that there had been forcible conversions, plunder and loot. He had no idea at all, however, why these outbreaks had taken place. He was *not* thinking of visiting Noakhali just then, he added. The same day he left for Darjeeling where the Governor was having a Cabinet meeting.

"It seems odd," commented *The Statesman* on the 18th October, "that, despite evidence of administrative breakdown in a part of the Province for weeks notoriously menaced by just this sort of catastrophe, there should have been no movement yet of Governor or Chief Minister to the point of catastrophe. The one remains in Darjeeling, the other has gone to join him there."

The disturbances then tended to move northwards. By the 20th October, most of the frenzied crowd which had been creating havoc in Ramganj, Begamganj, Raipur, Lakshmipur and Senbagh *thanas* for the last ten days moved into the Faridganj *thana* and Haimchar-Chandpur area in Tipperah district. A section was left behind to guard the "occupied" areas. Writing under date Noakhali, 22nd October, *The Statesman* staff reporter revealed that for the 13th day "about 120 villages in Ramganj, Lakshmipur, Begamganj and Senbagh *thanas* in Noakhali district, with a Hindu population of 90,000 and nearly 70 villages in Chandpur and Faridganj *thanas* in Tipperah district, with a Hindu population of about 40,000, remained besieged by hooligans."[2]

According to Mr. Taylor, Inspector-General of Police, the hooligans "were armed with guns and various types of other weapons and they were still defiant and not afraid to face the police and the military." As the mob proceeded "they cut telegraph wires, demolished bridges, dammed canals and damaged and barricaded roads, making ingress and egress to and from the invaded localities impossible (or difficult)."[3]

Acharya Kripalani, the President-elect of the Congress, accompanied by Sarat Chandra Bose and other Congress leaders flew over the affected area on the 19th October. The plane was flying very low and it gave the party a clear view of the whole area. Many houses were still burning in certain villages, and a mob was seen demolishing a bridge in a particular area, while groups of people were found gathering at different places as the plane flew over. The Chief Minister, who travelled by the same plane on the return journey, was seen taking photographs of the burning villages. Despatches of the military intelligence branch received at New Delhi referred to a certain ex-Member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly (Mian Ghulam Sarwar) who had been carrying on, long before the 10th October, a virulent propaganda to inflame communal feelings, which culminated in the holocaust. He was still reported to be at large. When this was brought to the notice of the authorities, they said that a warrant had been issued against him but he could not be traced. It was however reported that he was openly moving about and carrying on his activities.

The total area affected now exceeded 500 square miles. Reports of hooligans hampering relief work were received from unexpected places. "It is impossible to estimate", stated Lt. General F.R.R. Bucher, G.O.C., Eastern Command, on the 26th October in Calcutta, "how long it will take to restore confidence in the disturbed areas."[4]

In spite of the efforts of the hooligans to stop the egress of the people from the affected area, many managed to escape. As days passed by, the volume of refugees from the affected areas and areas that were threatened, began to swell. According to Sir Walter Gurner, Commissioner Civil Relief, Bengal Government, nearly 1,200 refugees from Noakhali and Tipperah were daily coming to Calcutta. The number of

refugees, reported Acharya Kripalani, could not be less than 40,000 in Tipperah district and Tripura State.

The refugees brought with them tales of gruesome happenings on a scale unprecedented in India's recent history. There had been burning of houses of almost all well-to-do and respectable Hindu families, systematic extortion of money under false assurances of protection, murder, brutal assaults on hundreds of innocent people, forcible conversion of entire families, forcible marriages of unmarried and remarriage to Muslims of already married women in the presence of their nearest and dearest ones. People who had been subjected to conversion and all sorts of tortures were now seen wearing Muslim dresses. They were forced to take forbidden food and perform Muslim religious rites.

Typical of the barbarities practised was the account given by a young girl of a well-known family from the village of Noakhali in the Ramganj police station. On the morning of the 11th October, a group of the village people came to their house and held out the threat that if they did not contribute Rs. 500 to the fund of a local organisation (Muslim League) at once, they would be murdered, their property looted and their houses burnt. The money was immediately paid. After a short while, a huge menacing crowd surrounded the house. One of the members of the family tried to pacify the crowd. Hardly had he uttered a word than the hooligans beheaded him with a *dao* (heavy, curved knife). They then attacked the oldest man in the *badi*. After butchering him, they seized his second son and forcibly placed him on the body of his father. The mother threw herself on her son and besought them not to kill him. Enraged by the intervention, they gave her a heavy blow with a *lathi* and removed her unconscious to another place. After dealing with their captive as before, they turned their attention to the father (of the girl). The girl rushed out of the house where she had been hiding and gave her father's would-be assassin some ornaments and Rs. 400 in cash as the price for sparing her father's life. "The man took the money and ornaments in the left hand and gave her father a fatal blow with the right."[5]

It turned out that the first reports about the number of persons killed (five thousand) were altogether panic-based. Unfortunately, this unchecked and unverified statement made by a very responsible person, who ought to have known better, received wide publicity and did infinite harm.

It was difficult to get people to file complaints before the authorities. Two hundred and fifty murder cases were recorded by the Noakhali Rescue, Relief and Rehabilitation Committee with the help of Committee lawyers. But the list was by no means considered to be exhaustive. As regards rape, people were reluctant to give information. But subsequent inquiries showed that cases of rape were far more numerous than the authorities admitted.

The first effect of the Noakhali outburst was stunning. It was followed by countrywide resentment and anger. What incensed public

opinion even more than the slaughter and carnage was the evidence of offences against women, abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriages. The anger over these spread far beyond Bengal.

"Arson, looting, murder, abduction of women, forced conversions and forced marriages," commented *The Statesman* on the 25th October, "are everywhere and by every investigator spoken of as the characteristics of the lawlessness. There is in common much more evidence of these crimes against women than the commons were permitted to learn. After the Calcutta catastrophe of August, there had been ample cause for strong precautions particularly on that very part of the map where renewed catastrophe has now occurred. Arrests of the miscreants seem to have been few. Energy has been miserably wanting somewhere." Referring to the plea that imperfect communications were responsible for the failure to get to grips with a major administrative breakdown, *The Statesman* proceeded: "It is not an adequate explanation for the public mind. It is bad country, but the hooligans manage to move about and the police have the general public to help them with information; they are not operating in Japanese-occupied country during war time."

Miss Muriel Lester, the English pacifist and well-known social worker of Kingsley Hall fame, happened to be in India at that time. On hearing news about the Noakhali happenings, she straightway proceeded there. In a report from a relief centre in Noakhali, in the first week of November, she wrote:

> The worst of all was the plight of the women. Several of them had had to watch their husbands being murdered and then be forcibly converted and married to some of those responsible for their death. These women had a dead look. It was not despair, nothing so active as that. It was utter blankness. . . . The eating of beef and declaration of allegiance to Islam has been forced upon many thousands as the price of their lives. . . . Perhaps the only thing that can be quite positively asserted about this orgy of arson and violence is that it was not a spontaneous uprising of the villagers. However many goondas may live in Bengal, they are incapable of organising this campaign on their own initiative. Houses have been sprayed with petrol and burnt. Who supplied this rationed fuel? Who imported stirrup-pumps into this rural area? Who supplied the weapons? . . . The goondas seem to think that they really are the rulers of this beautiful area of Bengal. *One sees no sign of fear among those who had stood by and watched destruction, tyranny and aggression; anxiety as to future punishment does not seem to exist.*[6] (Italics mine).

2

The Noakhali disturbances were neither accidental nor unexpected. The failure of Direct Action in Calcutta was set down by its progenitors to the numerical inferiority of the Muslims to the other

community. If the failure was to be retrieved, the blow had to be struck where the Muslims preponderated. Noakhali offered exceptional advantages.

Out of 22 lakhs of the total population of Noakhali, 18 lakhs or 81.33 per cent. were Muslims, 4 lakhs being Hindus. The total area of the district was 1,658 square miles. Occupationally 75% of the population were cultivators, zamindars and taluqdars. The middle class constituted 17% and artisans 7%. Although Hindus constituted only 18.67 per cent. of the population, they owned about 64 per cent. of the zamindary. Actually, however, the land was cultivated by tenantry who were in the vast bulk Muslim. Even where a Hindu owner cultivated his own land, he had to depend upon Muslim labour. Till recently, the Hindus held the bulk of the business in their hands and, being better educated, predominated in the professions, too. The Hindu landed gentry of Noakhali as a class showed all the signs of a decadent aristocracy. They came originally as pioneers. By their grit, enterprise, energy and organising skill they cleared the jungle, built tanks, roads and canals, covered the countryside with plantations and developed the country in a variety of ways. But their later descendents, under the demoralising effect of unearned income and relaxing Bengal climate, lost all those qualities and fell into a parasitic way of living. They had outlived the historical role which was once theirs. Quite a proportion of them—like landlords all over—were absentees, their estates were heavily encumbered and the recent Debt Settlement Legislation had further reduced them to impotence. In a region where they were in a minority of 2 to 9, they seemed still bent on remaining a house divided against itself by clinging to the inhuman practice of untouchability.

The bulk of Muslims of Noakhali are converts from Hinduism. As a class they are illiterate and backward, by nature simple, affable and peace-loving; one might even say timid. "Their feuds," to quote W. H. Thomson, "take them to court instead of bringing them to blows."[7] But they are extremely ignorant and excitable and can be easily misled, especially when their fanaticism is appealed to. Then they show an extraordinary capacity for organised mass action. To mention a small instance, during the non-cooperation days, they organised an "Allah-o-Akbar" chain-cry from Chittagong to Chandpur, a distance of over 100 miles; and even the incredibly short time taken to traverse that distance was given us when we were in Noakhali. They thus provide ideal material for fabricating a highly efficient push-button machine for mob-violence.

It is not so well known that one of the products of Noakhali and a principal item of export is theologians and divines. There are in Noakhali a larger number of Maulanas and Mullas than in any other part of India. Almost every sizable village holds one or two *hajees*. A *hajee* is a devout Muslim, who has performed a pilgrimage to Mecca and is held

in veneration on that account. Records Mr. Thomson: "Maulvis and Hafezes (one who has the whole of Koran by heart) are very numerous. . . . Yet all the settlement staff complained of the same thing, that the people have less honesty and less regard for the truth than they have found elsewhere."[8] The bulk of the students that crowd the theological academies at Deoband and Azamgarh in the United Provinces hail from Noakhali. Noakhali provides Imams to most of the mosques in West Bengal and even to places as far away as Bombay and Madras.

During the non-cooperation and Khilafat days of the twenties, the Muslim workers of Noakhali including Pirs, Maulvis and Maulanas joined the Congress movement in large numbers and were in the first flush of Hindu-Muslim unity lionised by Congressmen. After the suspension of the mass civil disobedience movement in 1922 at Bardoli, and the collapse of the Khilafat movement following upon the abolition of the Khilafat by Kemal Ataturk, the bulk of them fell back and in the 1930 civil disobedience movement they took very little part. The Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931 gave a fillip to their waning enthusiasm. Noakhali district is a salt-producing area. As a result of the salt concession under the Gandhi-Irwin pact[9] the peasant class took to salt manufacture extensively, the production and sale of tax-free salt being not less than five lakhs of rupees annually. Then came the 1932 civil disobedience struggle. It convulsed the whole district, and at one stage the British administration in the district seemed to be almost on the point of being paralysed. The bureaucracy were not slow to react to this challenge. They had not forgotten how in 1921 an illiterate Hindu cobbler and two illiterate Muslim hotelwallas standing on the Congress ticket had heavily defeated at the polls a Government pleader, who was a Rai Bahadur, and two Khan Bahadurs—all the three titled candidates forfeiting their deposit money! When all other means had been tried, the favourite one of communal division was resorted to. The district authorities rallied round them all the Pirs, Maulvis and Mullas who had deserted the Congress ranks. A Krishak Samiti (Peasants' Party) movement had been in existence for some time before. It was an agrarian movement to begin with. Under the new orientation, it was given a wholly communal and reactionary turn. Free use was made of the Government's "discretionary fund" to further its propaganda. The then Muslim District Magistrate of Noakhali wholly identified himself with the new movement and used himself to address the Krishak Samiti meetings. The speeches delivered at these meetings and the slogans raised during the processions were anti-Congress, rabidly communal, and defamatory of every class and section of the Hindus, not excluding Hindu women.

Exemplifying the attitude of the bureaucracy was a remark dropped by a Chief Secretary of the Bengal Government. In the course of a talk with a well-known newspaper-man, he was reported to have delivered himself as follows: "You Hindus are revolutionaries. You non-cooperate.

You oppose us by civil disobedience. We have to have at least one party on our side. We have, therefore, taken the Muslim League with us. If you cooperate with us, we shall (suiting the action to the words) kick them." Referring to the particular civil servant who was then in charge of Noakhali district, he remarked: "We carry on administration on the reports we receive. And the report of Mr. D. (the Divisional Commissioner) was that Mr. N. (the District Magistrate) successfully killed the civil disobedience movement in Noakhali. How can we remove him?"

Muslims in Noakhali provide all kind of manual labour for cultivation of land—planting and harvesting of paddy, picking of coconuts and betel-nuts from the trees, earth-digging etc. The Krishak Samiti people's next move was to organise an economic boycott of the Hindus and ask the Muslims not to provide them any labour, so that they would be forced to buy peace by paying blackmail to the Krishak Samiti. Those who stood out were harassed and life was made impossible for them. The harassment took various forms, e.g., refusal by Bargadars (share croppers) to pay to the Hindu owners of land their share of the produce or to relinquish possession of their land; cattle-lifting; firing of hay-stacks and garden-fences; theft or forcible removal of standing crops; dacoities in Hindu houses by armed gangs; frequent criminal assaults on Hindu women for which no adequate redress could be had; stealing of images and gold ornaments from temples and desecration of temples. The bulk of the markets and weekly bazars had been organised by the Hindus on their own lands. To oust them from these markets, the Krishak Samiti resorted to the ingenious device of organising the selling of beef in these markets. When the Hindus objected, they boycotted them and started rival markets on Muslim lands. In this way, a number of flourishing markets at Raipur, Dattapara, Nandigram, Karpara, Lamchar—some of them more than half-a-century old—were successfully boycotted and ruined.

The brains behind this campaign of organised intimidation, lawlessness and blackmail was a Muslim member of the Bengal Legislative assembly known among his followers as "Shah Sayed Ghulam Sarwar Hussaini, Pir Saheb of Daira Sharif, village Shampur, Noakhali". He set himself up as the local Fuehrer. He had devised an ingenious technique of gaining control of the local machinery of law and administration and using it to lord it over others, on the one hand, and to dictate to the authorities from below, while outwardly continuing to hob-nob with them in order to impress the ignorant village folk, on the other.

This went on right from 1932 to 1939. Then came the Second World War. It brought in its wake three lean years (1940-1942) in succession, followed by a flood that devastated crops over 165 square miles. Even in normal times, Noakhali is a deficit district. The Government's wartime policy of procurement and control further accentuated the crisis. The price of rice from Rs. 6 a maund in the beginning of 1942 went

up to Rs. 15 in March and to Rs. 60 in July 1943. In the famine of 1942-43, about 50 thousand people died of starvation and about 25 thousand migrated to West Bengal. In 1911 the area of the district was computed at 1,644 square miles and the population at 1,174,728 giving a density of 714 persons per square mile. In 1946, the area of the district was 1,658 miles and the population 2,217,402 giving a density of 1,337 persons per square mile. The percentage of landless labourers before the war was 36, at the end of the war it rose to 60. The cost of living doubled, black-marketing flourished, there was a marked rise in the index of crime; and it so happened that the majority of the get-rich-quick folk were Hindus who provided an easy target to the communalists for attack.

Thus, on the eve of the Cabinet Mission's visit, Noakhali presented the appearance of a veritable powder-keg. It only needed a spark to touch it off. The spark was provided by the "Direct Action" resolution of the Muslim League. Quite a number of Noakhali Muslims were employed in Calcutta in the docks, in factories, and in various trades. A number of them returned to Noakhali after the Great Calcutta Killing and helped to spread tales of riot-horrors which inflamed the Muslim mass mind.

To this was added another incentive. The Muslim League claimed for Pakistan the whole of Bengal, where it contended that the Muslims were in a majority. The claim was disputed by the opposite side and at best rested on a narrow, precarious margin—the Muslims constituting 54.73 per cent. of the total population. If the establishment of a Muslim State in the east was to be contingent upon the counting of heads according to whether they were Hindu or Muslim, "Direct Action"—interpreted by the ignorant fanatical set to include wholesale conversions and murder—offered an easy short-cut. And, if it could be made successful in Noakhali, why not in other parts of Bengal and ultimately in the whole of India? Thus argued the fanatics. Were not the bulk of the Muslims in India converts, or the descendants of converts? A crazy notion it might seem, but those were days of romantic madness!

* * *

On the 29th August, 1946, there was a sudden flare-up in the town of Noakhali. It was Id-ul-Fitr—a Muslim festival. A rumour had been set afloat that Sikhs, hired by the Hindus, were killing the Muslims *en masse*. Infuriated crowds of Muslims poured into the town from various suburban mosques, armed with whatever weapons they could lay hands on. Some Hindu fishermen were manhandled. The next day came news of the harm done by similar rumours throughout the district. The son of an important Congressman of Babupur village was murdered in broad daylight and the Congress house set on fire. Stray cases of waylaying and murder of Hindus on high-roads, village-ways and *khals* were reported from the mofussil.

A joint meeting of the Ulema (Muslim divines) and the Muslim League was announced by Mian Ghulam Sarwar on the 6th September by beat of drum to "devise ways and means to wreak vengeance for the Great Calcutta Killing." Exciting speeches were made and it was impressed upon the gathering that the time was now ripe for fabricating weapons and wielding them against the Hindus. The meeting took place on the 7th September at Shahpur.

The next day, another meeting was held at the village of Dasgharia and the mob were told to await the directions of the "High Command" before starting "Direct Action" against the Hindus of Noakhali. Breaking of idols and desecration of Hindu places of worship was openly preached at this meeting. On their way back from the meeting, the mob took away the idols from the family temple of a well-known Hindu resident at Shahpur and desecrated the temple. On the following day about a thousand people in three batches, carrying Muslim League flags, looted Hindu dealers in fish, betel-leaves and molasses in Shahpur bazar.

A few days later, the Superintendent of Police met the Muslim League members of Shahpur, Karpara, Lamchar and adjacent villages in a huge gathering. The attitude of the League representatives was defiant. The Hindus of the locality asked for an armed patrol on bazar days. But nothing came out of their request. From the next day it began to be given out by the ring-leaders that the Muslims could do whatever they liked with Hindu lives and property for a week; Government would not interfere.

A large proportion of the intelligentsia and well-to-do people in Noakhali have either jobs in Calcutta or do business or send their children for education there. During the Puja holidays in the month of October, people returning from Calcutta to their mofussil homes in Noakhali found to their surprise that boats were being searched at every bridge and at every turn of the *khal* by people styling themselves as "League volunteers", "Muslim National Guards", and so on. Boat-drivers in Noakhali are mostly Muslims. They were directed by the ring-leaders not to carry Hindu passengers. The latter were sometimes manhandled and their belongings snatched away from them. Muslims held secret nightly meetings from which Hindus were rigorously excluded. All Hindu newcomers on their arrival in a locality were interrogated, their movements shadowed, and their freedom of movement restricted. They were prevented even from meeting or calling on one another by their Muslim neighbours. There was an odour of something ominous, evil brewing in the air. In desperation the President of the Hindu Mahasabha of Noakhali and the Chairman-in-charge of the Noakhali Municipality approached the District Muslim League leaders and appealed to them for peace and security. The latter's answers were evasive. The deputationists invited them to tour the district with them:

"I tell them that the District Magistrate has at last sanctioned a jeep and we may tour the district through and through for . . . communal harmony. But they hesitate and say that they would give . . . definite answer the next day. But the next day they refuse point-blank to accompany us and address joint meetings. . . . I am . . . perturbed. . . . I see the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police and try to make them realise the . . . (magnitude) and nature of the impending disaster. But the Superintendent of Police only says that the incidents of which we spoke are baseless and false and there is no danger of anything happening which the force at his disposal cannot control. Military or more armed police, he thinks, (are) unnecessary."[10] The District Magistrate, N. G. Ray, was to have left Noakhali on the 12th October under orders of transfer. "I appeal to him to stay. He realises the gravity of the situation and the coming danger. But he cannot stay. He must go, he says, but he would do what he could to save the minority."[11]

And, instead of 12th October, the District Magistrate left the district on 10th October—the very day the great massacre broke out.

3

The holocaust commenced on the 10th October, the Lakshmi Puja day. The rainy season was far advanced. *Khals* were overflowing with water. The rice fields were flooded. The District Board road was breached owing to heavy rains. Smaller roads were under water. The *shankos* (bamboo bridges) were all guarded by the hooligans.

Rai Saheb Rajendralal Chowdhury of Chowdhurybadi, Karpara, President of the Noakhali Bar Association, had made himself an eyesore to the local Fuehrer by organising defence against the growing lawlessness. There used to be in his *badi* in those days a sadhu of Bharat Sevashram, Tryambakanand by name. He had been trying to revive the institution of Sitala Puja in Hindu *badis* with some success. A rumour went round that the sadhu had bragged that on the forthcoming occasion he would perform the Puja with the blood of the Muslims instead of the usual goat's blood. A short run from Karpara was Shampur, the headquarters of Ghulam Sarwar, the Fuehrer. On hearing the news, he turned berserk and threatened that he would have the heads of the sadhu and Rai Saheb Rajendralal Chowdhury cut off. On the morning of the 10th October, he sent a chowkidar with a letter summoning the two to meet him in Shahpur bazar. The Rai Saheb suspecting foul play, refused to go. The Fuehrer became excited. At 8 a.m. he addressed a gathering of several thousand in Shahpur bazar when, it was alleged, he demanded the heads of Rajendralal and the sadhu and incited the mob to arson and loot. A *thana* officer of Ramganj, a Muslim, was present on the scene. He was ordered by the Fuehrer to return with his men to the boat that was moored in the *khal* below and wait there. He

sheepishly obeyed. The mob then set fire to the Kali temple in the bazar and cut the sacred banyan tree (*Kali gach*) under the very eyes of the *thana* officer. All Hindu shops in the bazar were looted and burnt.

After finishing Shahpur bazar, the mob divided itself into three sections. One section proceeded in the direction of Ramganj bazar, to the north-west. The other looted Hindu shops in Dasgharia bazar and burnt the Thakur Mandir (temple) there. The third attacked the *katchery* of Suren Bose, the zamindar of Narayanpur. Suren Bose had been warned of the coming danger by a friendly police officer that very morning and advised to flee. But he refused saying, "I do not want to leave my brethren behind. . . . I must . . . face death with them." When the attack came he opened fire. He was set upon by the mob and killed, the *katchery* set on fire and the dead body thrown upon the flames. Five other occupants of the house were killed likewise.

On the morning of the 11th October, at about 8 a.m., Chowdhury-badi itself was attacked; first by a small batch of 30 to 40 rioters shouting, "Allah-o-Akbar", "Hindur Rakta Chai" (we demand the blood of Hindus) etc. Rajendralal Chowdhury and his son with some young men met them some distance from the main building. Three of the attackers were killed. The mob then fell back and returned after about three hours with reinforcements, not less than ten thousand strong. In the meantime the members of Rajendralal's family and a number of men and women and children from adjacent *badis* had taken refuge on the roof of the Rai Saheb's house and barricaded themselves. From there one Kali Prasanna Raut, by a skilfully directed fire from his muzzle-loader, kept the rioters at bay for several hours, till his ammunition was exhausted. He then broke the gun across his knee and threw it into the building. Thirty to forty of the attackers, it was said, were killed and several hundred wounded.

When the firing ceased, the rioters returned and piling up wood, bamboo and pieces of fencing etc. against the building, set fire to it with the help of petrol and kerosene. "Fire breaking out immediately, women, children and the aged began to scream desperately in terror."[12] Some rioters from below let fly among them. One person was killed. Those who had escaped injury tried to save themselves by lying down on the roof but were subjected to a fierce fusillade of brickbats, bottles etc. from below. A part of the building consumed by fire then collapsed and crushed to death a number of those who had taken shelter below and some on the roof. When the blaze became too fierce, those on the roof piteously begged the mob below to rescue them. The Fuehrer stood watching at a distance. At his orders a ladder was ingeniously improvised by felling a coconut tree against the wall of the building and all male members from the burning building were brought down one by one, stripped naked, roped to trees and butchered with *daos* in the presence of their womenfolk. Rai Saheb Rajendralal Chowdhury was led off

(1)

'Chadwick' Simla. 3.5.46.

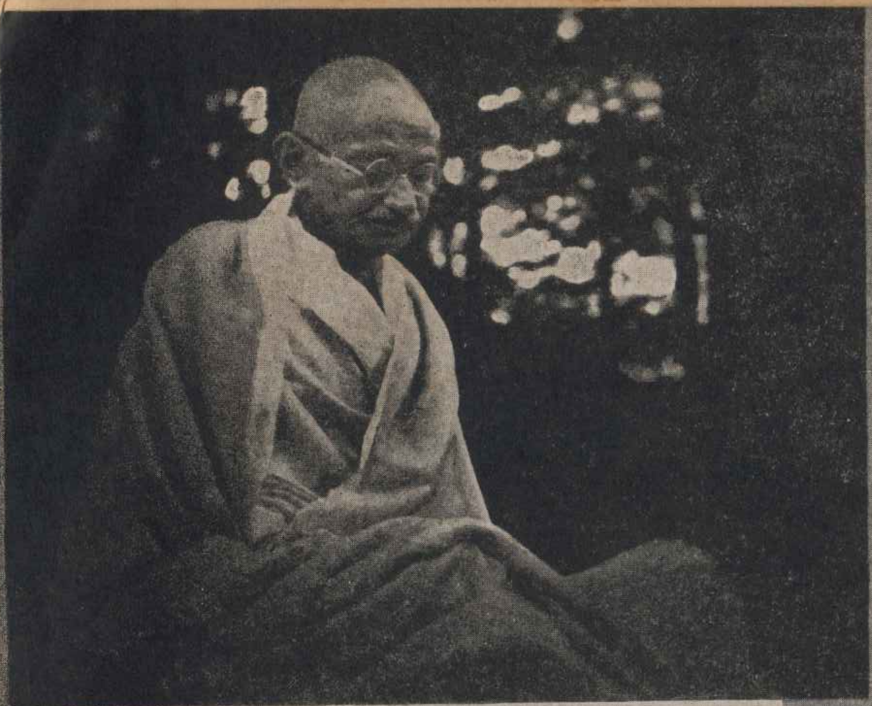
Dear Mr. Abell, (22)

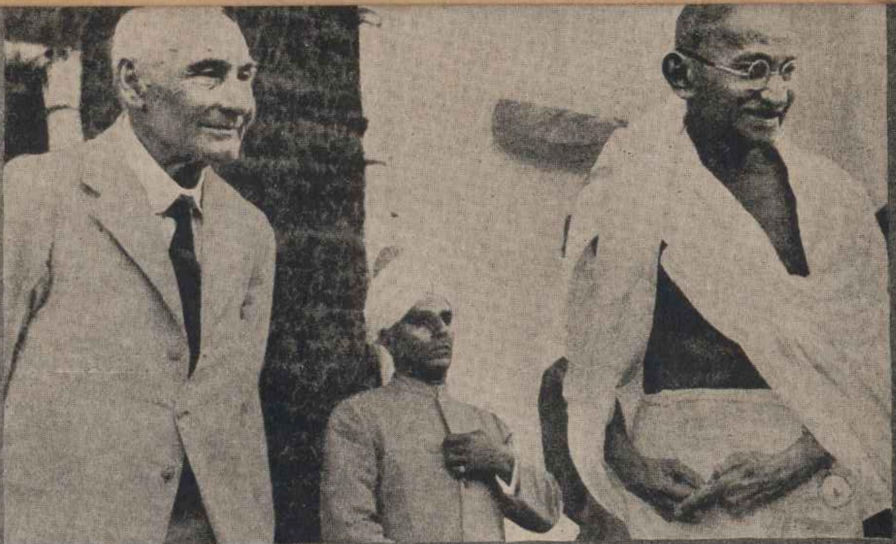
~~I send~~ Salt is not off my brain. For the sake of English honour I say that there should not be a day's delay about the abolition of this monopoly. It is an impression upon me what it is the monopoly has meant. I enclose herewith an additional note prepared by Shri Pyarelal.

Yours sincerely,
Sd. M. K. Gandhi

"Salt is not off my brain." (page 200)

[ONE









TWO] 1. Gandhiji with members of the British Parliamentary Delegation. (page 162) 2. Gandhiji with Lord Pethick-Lawrence. 3. Gandhiji with Sir Stafford Cripps at Bhangi Colony. 4. At Mussorie in deep meditation.

(1)

(5) 25-7-45

I have just heard from Sardar Patel that several thousand Indian soldiers who had joined Subhas Babu in Burma & who were arrested or captured during the recent anti-Japanese operations have been locked up in the Delhi Fort and the ring leaders so called have been shot under the decree of a court martial. I am disinclined to think that this is a bazaar rumour. I nevertheless suggest that the public may be taken into confidence as to the true situation and that, if there is any truth about the lockup and trial, legal assistance of their choice may be given to those who may be tried.

This is being posted after post office hours. Hence copy under a certificate

Posting will follow when the post office opens

(2)

This I write in fear & trembling lest I may be over stepping my limit.

I am watching the progress of the trial of the members of the corps raised by Shri Subhas Babu. Though I can have nothing in common with any defence by force of arms, I am never blind to the valour and patriotism often displayed by persons in arms. This seems to be a case in point. And can the Government afford to ignore the almost if not the wholly unanimous opinion of Indians

(3)

of all shades of opinion. These men who are on their trial, are adored by ~~the whole of India~~ [almost] The Government have over whelming might on their side. But it will be a misuse of it if it is used in the teeth of universal Indian opinion. It is not for me to say what should be done. Let H.E. decide what is best in the circumstances

Gandhiji and the Indian National Army undertrial prisoners. "This I write in fear and trembling." (page 176)

(1)

whilst I thank you for
your prompt reply to my
~~ett~~ letter, you will let me say
that ~~the reply~~ it is unfortunate. ~~gives no satis-
faction~~ It has the old official
flavour. Has "ruling independence
in fact" no foundation?
~~But I~~ must ~~do not wish to argue.~~
x I was deeply grieved to
learn about Sir Stafford's
illness. Let me hope that
he will soon be better.
x I adhere to all that I have
said in my letter of 20th ~~except~~
~~that it might have more accurately~~
~~to say~~ your letter is in the best
imperialistic style which
I thought had gone for ever.
This is from an old friend.

(2)

The question to be decided is whether the Europeans who are foreigners and non-nationals are entitled to vote at the election of or be candidates for the election of members for the proposed Constituent Assembly.

The State Paper seems to negative the claim. Please read among others paras 3 and 18 of the State Paper of May 16, 1946.

New Delhi,
16-6-1946.

M K Gandhi

FOUR]

1. A "lovers' quarrel" between Gandhiji and Lord Pethick-Lawrence. (page 212) 2. Legal reference to lawyers on the issue of the European vote. (page 217)

(1)

(9)

I understand from Sudhir something quite different

I understood that you proposed to scrap the whole plan

(1A)

of interim Government as it has come out up to now & consider the situation de novo

(2)

Then if you say that you will form a Government out of the acceptances it won't work as far as I can see. If you are not in a desperate hurry & if you would

M.S. V. 161

(3)

discuss the thing with me I would gladly do so after I have opened my lips i.e. after 8 p.m. Meanwhile you should have if you don't mind the W.C. letter of rejection

The story of Gandhiji's crucial meeting with the Cabinet Mission on the 24th June, 1946, his day of silence. "I understand that you propose to scrap the whole pian of Interim Government." (page 225)

3

of the proposal contained in the Viceroy's letter of 22nd instant. In my opinion that letter puts a new appearance on the the interim government. The object

④

M.S.V. 141

of the W.C. so far as I know to help the mission, not to hinder it except when its project results in the W.C. committing suicide. Such talk led me

⑤

4

to see light through the prevailing darkness. But is there really light?

As to the Constituent Assembly I was quite clear up to yesterday after

⑥

M.S.V. 141

noon that the Congress should work the Constituent Assembly to the best of its ability. But the rules I read yesterday have revolutionised my mentality. There is a

⑦

SIX] "The object of the Working Committee . . . is to help the Mission, not to hinder it." (The note continues.)

8

serious flaw.
because nobody.
But a flaw is
a flaw. The
three parties
must not
work with
three minds
& hope for
success

M.S. V. 141.

9

Then you
should not
isolate a
particular
section from
the whole. Why
not say - under
the State Rules
as a whole

M.S. V. 141.

10

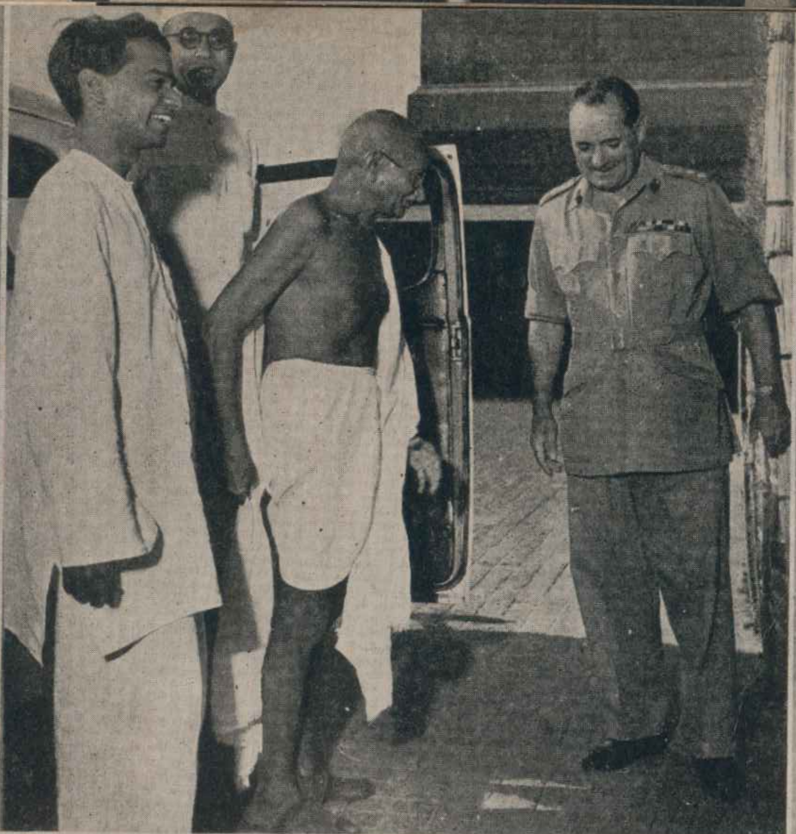
However
I would gladly
discuss ~~this~~
question also
with you in
the evening
I am sorry to
cause you all
this trouble.
I only hope
that you

11

perceive
my object in
all this ~~[illegible]~~
~~[illegible]~~
effort

M.S. V. 141.

"I only hope that you perceive my object in all this effort." (The note concludes.)





EIGHT] 1. Gandhiji goes to meet the Cabinet Delegation. From left to right, Sudhir Ghosh, the author and Gandhiji. "They began well." (page 191)

2. Food Front. Gandhiji with Herbert Hoover at the Viceroy's House. "I would far rather that we learnt to appreciate the beauty of colour in vegetables." (page 161)

Gandhiji's message to the Working Committee. "Their recommendation will remain in their mouths." (page 226)

(1)

In reply to your telephone message I am sending you a line on behalf of the W.C. who as well as others are sorry to say that after full consideration and deliberation they have reluctantly been obliged to decide against the acceptance of interim govt. proposals.

(2)

A detailed and reasoned reply will follow tomorrow. No decision is yet possible on the question of the long term arrangement adumbrated in the state paper of 16th May last.

(3)

That is the least that is wanted.

The interim govt. matter is nebulous

TEN] Gandhiji's draft of interim reply for the Working Committee. (page 226) "There never was such complete accord again." (page 228)



(2)





(4)



(1)

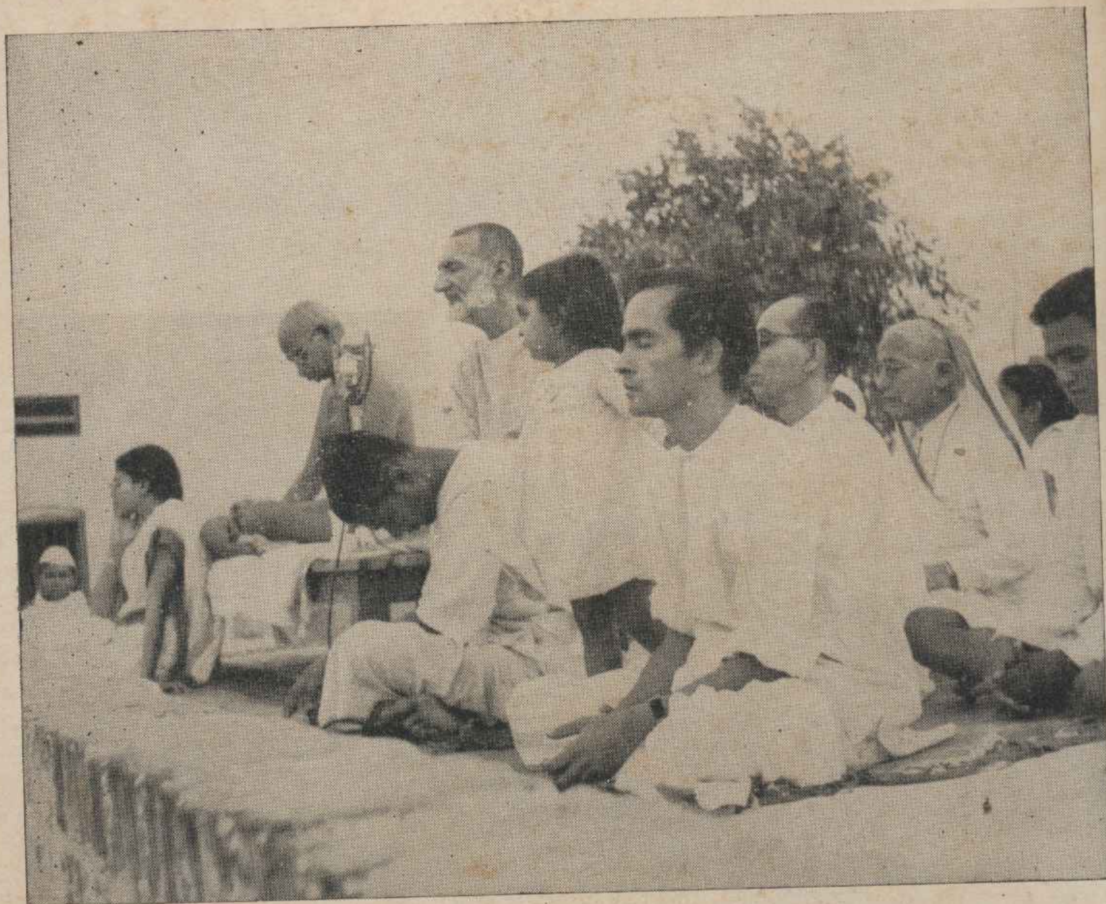


(5)

(6)



"Hell broke loose in Noakhali." (page 277) 1. Refugees. 2. Chowdhurybadi — a ladder was ingeniously improvised." (page 288) 3. A surviving member —"brought tears. . . ." (page 290) 4, 5 & 6. "Like a blitzed city." (page 290)



TWELVE]

Gandhiji's Evening Prayer Meeting,
in Valmik Temple (1946)

separately from the rest to a log of wood and beheaded. The severed head was carried in procession to be presented to the Fuehrer—"the mad crowd shouting and yelling in a terrible manner."[13]

All other adjacent houses, in the meantime, had been first looted and then burnt. Kali Prasanna Raut tried to escape by jumping into a tank close by, but was discovered, dragged out of the tank at the end of a *teta* (many-pronged fishing spear with sharp hooks) and killed. The womenfolk were led away to different places, "a crowd in front and a crowd behind"[14] to the accompaniment of taunts, jeers and other unmentionable indignities. Late at night, some of them were brought back and left in a neighbouring *badi*. Rai Saheb Rajendralal's wife with some others took refuge in the *badi* of one of Rajendralal's Muslim servants, from where they were rescued a week later, on the 18th October, by Abdul Gofran, the Minister of Civil Supplies. Two girls of the family were brought by a gang of ruffians to Shahpur high school, where they were violated. One of them was then taken to Shahpur bazar and murdered. The other escaped, lost her way and was directed by a kind-hearted Muslim shop-keeper, who was moved to pity by her plight, to Rajbadi in Shahpur, where she took refuge. The hooligans traced her there and demanded her surrender under threats. The poor girl with tears begged her Hindu hosts to give her poison and end her life. But they thrust her out into the pitch-dark night, out of craven fear. The sky was overcast and there was deep mud everywhere. In despair she turned from one to the other of her captors and ultimately invoked protection of one of them, who was a schoolmaster. He reassured her, called her sister, afterwards betrayed her, kept her confined in his house for some days, then moved her from place to place. Finally, she was taken out in a boat into the flooded rice fields and murdered near Khalispara, a village about half a mile from Shahpur Rajbadi, the corpse being thrown into the water.

The next day, under the cover of night, the rioters chopped off the heads from the dead bodies. On the 12th October, the headless trunks were likewise removed, put into sacks and thrown into a tank near Lamchar village from where at the time of Gandhiji's visit to that place on the 13th January, 1947, sacks containing 13 dead bodies were dragged out by the boatman of the present writer. Post-mortem report by Dr. Sushila Nayar revealed that two of the corpses were those of women. The number of casualties at Chowdhurybadi that day, that could be identified, was, killed 24, wounded 69, and missing 93.

The mysterious sadhu Tryambakanand, according to his own version, slipped out of Chowdhurybadi after the first attack by the hooligans. When he returned he found the building in flames and the dead bodies of the inmates, and those who had taken shelter there, strewn all over the place. He then quickly left the place, hid himself in the jungle and swam across the adjoining *khal* shortly after midnight. It was then

raining heavily. Wending his way through paddy fields and jungles, he reached Ramganj. From there he was conducted under armed police escort to Noakhali and ultimately reached Calcutta to give colourful accounts of his adventures to the Press!

A five-year old child belonging to the Chowdhury family who had survived the massacre was presented to Gandhiji when he took up his residence in Dattapara refugee camp. She became the mascot of the camp, including the Government officials, and brought tears to the eyes of many by her innocent prattle about the ghastly happenings in the Chowdhurybadi to which she had been witness.

The charred barrel of Kali Prasanna Raut's muzzle-loader was picked up from the debris by one of the rioters and made strange history two years later.[15] Blackened and twisted masses of corrugated sheets covered the whole place for months afterwards, giving it the appearance of a blitzed city. Heaps of ashes, cinders and charred remains of household belongings lay at scores of places where the houses had once stood. Here and there one stumbled upon half-calcined human bones among the ashes. In one of the burnt huts, Gandhiji found a child's skull and the remains of the finger-digits and the fore-arm of a little baby.

After the havoc in Shahpur bazar, the Fuehrer sent information to the authorities that "goondas from outside" had come and done it and that his life and the lives of the local people were in danger! He even started giving relief out of the loot to his victims, who, having been converted to Islam, were now his flock! He was arrested and taken into custody by the military on the 22nd October.

4

Simultaneously with the outbreak at Shahpur on the 10th October, almost all the bazars from Sonapur to Panchgaon, covering a length of 13 miles, were looted. At Panchgaon a mob of 500 Muslims, armed with deadly weapons, refused to disperse when ordered by the Superintendent of Police on the 11th October. Instead, they invited him to attend the conversion of an octogenarian local Hindu zamindar. An S.O.S. was received on the 12th October from one Dakshini Babu of Noakhola asking to be rescued as his life was in danger. The Superintendent of Police was approached but could not be prevailed upon to requisition more armed force or military help. The Chairman-in-charge of Noakhali Municipality, with the Additional District Magistrate, tried to get to the disturbed area on the 13th October. They got as far as Naodana village. In the distance they could see the western locality ablaze but could not proceed further west, the road being under water, and they were forced to return. Dakshini Babu was killed on the 12th evening.

And so the havoc spread from village to village and from *thana* to

thana. Harrowing tales of fresh attacks on villages, massacres of entire families, mass conversion, arson and loot poured in from Gopairbag, Noakhola, Chandipur, Amishapara, Dalal Bazar, Raipur, Naori, Bara-Gobindpur and Haimchar. In Sandwip island the trouble started as late as 19th or 20th October, and the aftermath continued much longer. Cut off from the mainland it became an "island of fear".[16]

The rioters everywhere came well prepared. They showed a high degree of organisation, acted under leaders, and the various batches were named after the villages from which they were recruited. Nearly all their crimes were perpetrated in broad daylight. In very few cases they continued after nightfall. They invariably attacked in great force, with a lightning suddenness, and acted with inconceivable ruthlessness, especially when they encountered resistance. The slogans they used were: "Allah-o-Akbar", "Pakistan Zindabad", "Larke Lenge Pakistan" (we shall take Pakistan by force), "Muslim League Zindabad" and "Kali-katar Pratishodh Chai" (we want revenge for Calcutta). Their *modus operandi* followed a well-defined and uniform pattern. The various phases of action followed each other in waves. First came extortion. Subscription was demanded in the name of the Muslim League. Assurance was held out that those who paid would be spared. The promise was not always kept. Even when life was spared, property was not.

After extortion, surrender of all arms was demanded; the penalty for withholding a single weapon, even a scythe or a sickle being instantaneous death to the whole family. Everything that could be removed was then plundered and the houses set on fire with kerosene and petrol. It was locally reported that for a month before the riots, kerosene could not be had at the ration shops in the affected area for love or money.

After arson there was looting again. Everything that had escaped fire or was not completely burnt, e.g., door-leaves, window-frames, corrugated iron sheets etc., was looted. This went on for days together. The survivors were asked to accept Islam if they wanted to live. The victims were sometimes required, as a proof of the genuineness of their conversion, to give their unmarried, widowed and sometimes even already married daughters in "marriage" to Muslims selected by the mob. In all these cases the village Maulvis, who accompanied the mob, were ready with their services, thus acting at the same time as hooligans and priests.

After conversion, guards were placed at the residence of the victims, ostensibly for their protection but actually—as some of the "guards" themselves afterwards admitted to us—to prevent their escape and make their conversion permanent. In some places the ring-leaders had the temerity to issue "conversion" certificates as "safe conduct" passes to the families of victims going out of the cordoned areas.[17]

There was a systematic attempt to exterminate the intelligentsia and in the case of well-to-do families all the male heirs. Among

those who took part in the disturbances, figured presidents and members of Union Boards, Muslim National Guards, Muslim schoolmasters and students of schools and colleges, local criminal elements of the community and a sprinkling of ordinary Muslim village-folk including women and children. Later the hooligans quarrelled among themselves over the division of the spoils and sometimes gave information against one another. A boat belonging to a local Hindu merchant was stolen during the disturbances by an ex-president of a Union Board. On information provided by his rival in office, the present writer with the help of the then District Magistrate, Mr. McInerny, was able to recover and restore the boat to the owner. The culprit was, however, allowed to escape scot-free for "lack of evidence", the witnesses all being scared away by threats. During the trial the public prosecutor and the trying magistrate were heard in the court-room to browbeat and stigmatise the witnesses for the complainant as "traitors" who were helping "Kaffirs" against their own Muslim brethren!

As a result of the Second World War, there was a large number of demobilised ex-servicemen in Noakhali, computed at about 56,000 for the whole district. They provided the military strategy—breached roads, dammed up canals, cut telegraph wires and employed diversionary tactics to disperse and immobilise the police force and paralyse the administration. Later, Dr. Amiya Chakravarty of Calcutta University, reported they engaged in working "a system of parallel police, espionage and information organisation."[18]

The *char* area in Tipperah district was in some respects the worst hit. R. Gupta of the Indian Civil Service, who was appointed as special officer by the Bengal Government to inquire into the actual conditions in the affected areas, reported on the 4th November, 1946, after a tour of the Raipur *thana*, that arson had been committed on 80 to 90 per cent. of Hindu houses and 99 per cent. of houses were looted. "Conversion was if anything on a bigger scale than in Lakshmipur and Begamganj. Even at *thana* headquarters large number of converts were still compelled to wear Muslim dress."

A notable case of conversion was that of Haren Ghosh, secretary of the Congress Committee, Raipur. Arson started in Raipur *thana* on the 13th October. Ten ruffians came to Raipur and said that if all the Hindus embraced Islam they would be spared, except a list of six named persons, three of whom were afterwards murdered. On 14th October, a crowd of 500 ruffians armed with daggers, *lathis*, *ballams* and *ram-daos*, kerosene oil and petrol, shouting "Allah-o-Akbar" and "Pakistan Zindabad" attacked Raipur. They first of all took away all movable property, then destroyed Hindu temples and idols and last of all set fire to the village with kerosene and petrol. Harendra Ghosh escaped and hid himself in the jungles, ponds and paddy fields in the daytime and at night reached the house of two Muslim workers, who told

him that the only thing that might save him in the coming critical days was conversion. He had to agree. Accordingly, they wrote out a "Pamphlet No. 1" and put his signature to it. On the 15th October, they brought him to Raipur mosque and confined him there. Here another pamphlet, "Pamphlet No. 2" was written, printed in the local press in thousands with his signature and like the previous pamphlet, distributed amongst Hindus and Muslims of the locality. He was confined here for 12 days. "My daily food was rice and beef which I was forced to eat. I was taught Namaz and had to give lectures on Fridays in front of thousands of Muslims on the subject of Islamic creed and culture. Among the leaders who took part in this barbarity and met daily in the mosque morning and evening to issue directions were a local M.L.A., secretary of the Thana Muslim League, two secretaries of the Union Peace Committee, two presidents of Union Boards and a zamindar."[19]

In Haimchar area, R. Gupta found that "hundreds of families of Namasudras (Scheduled Castes), who were forcibly converted, were completely marooned and virtually prisoners." The Haimchar area consisted of three Unions in the Chandpur sub-division of Tipperah district. Haimchar bazar was the nerve centre of this area. Immediately adjoining it to the north was the Charsoladi group of villages, while about two miles to the south-east lay the Charbhanga circle of villages. In Haimchar there was a flourishing bazar. It was established some fifty years ago. Business was almost exclusively in Hindu hands, Muslims had very little share in the general prosperity. The attitude of the Hindus towards the Muslims on all accounts was overbearing and supercilious.

On the 14th October, the Hindus who went to Hydergunj bazar in Raipur police station returned with disquieting news. Close on their heels came refugees from Noakhali with horrible tales of loot, arson and murder. From the bordering villages fires could be seen burning all day long, and wild rumours travelled from hour to hour. One such rumour was that 40,000 to one lakh Muslims armed with guns, swords and spears were coming to attack the Hindus. On the night of the 14th October, Hindus of Charbhanga decided to send a deputation to the Muslims of the neighbouring village of Gandamara. They were told that they would have to embrace Islam and pay a large sum of money to the Muslim League. They agreed. On the morning of 15th October, Muslims in batches of 50 and 200 came to loot and convert. Conversion was nominal but looting was complete. The Hindus of Charsoladi, on the other hand, offered resistance but it was overcome by a deceitful ruse. The whole of Haimchar bazar was then given over to arson and loot for three days.[20] Mr. Simpson of the Indian Civil Service, who was appointed by the Bengal Government to tour the area in the first week of November, in his report observed: "I was appalled by what I saw

in such villages as Paikpara and Haimchar. In all the affected villages, the scene of wreckage cannot be adequately described. Large homesteads have ceased to exist. No description of the condition of Haimchar bazar can be sufficiently vivid. It must be visited to be appreciated. Nearly all shops have been destroyed by fire and the wreckage is appalling. When I visited the bazar on the 30th October, one of the fires was still smouldering. The bazar might well have been destroyed by high explosive missiles from the air."

* * *

Against this general background of devastation, darkness and despair there stood out instances of individual courage and heroism, fidelity and undying faith, reminding one that the divine spark in the heart of man may be eclipsed but is never extinguished and the law of non-violence operates even in the midst of carnage. There were instances of Hindus who preferred death to conversion. There was the noble instance of Navadwip Pandit of Raipur. He had taken shelter with a sum of Rs. 20,000 in cash on his person in the police station at Raipur at the invitation of the *thana* officer. When the mob approached the *thana*, the *thana* officer pushed him out. The mob relieved him of all his cash and demanded his conversion. He refused and chose to be killed with the name of God on his lips.

Numerous cases of good Muslims who risked their lives in order to save their Hindu neighbours, stood out likewise like shining lights in the darkness of degradation. In village Hasnabad, Hindus and Muslims pledged themselves not to allow the peace of their locality to be affected. Learning that a batch of ruffians would meet at a particular place to settle their plans of attack, the Muslims conveyed the information to the local police sub-inspector, who placed a secret watch over their rendezvous and all the ruffians were rounded up.

At Bhatialpur, where I was later stationed, a God-fearing Muslim pleaded with the mob not to kill their good doctor, Dr. Chandra Shekhar Bhowmik, who after Gandhiji's arrival in Noakhali became my colleague and Bengali interpreter. Someone from the mob aimed a vicious knife-blow at him. But this good Muslim took it on his own hand, receiving a severe cut. In November, 1946, when I unwittingly ran into a nest of danger, while engaged in an errand of mercy which nearly cost me my life, this Muslim with another local Muslim, acted as my saving angel. (See Vol. II, Chapter V, Section 2). We did not meet again till about a year later one dark night he hailed me on a lonely footpath: "Do you recognise me?" I could not. He laughed. "I am the one who interposed myself between you and those who wanted to kill you soon after your arrival amongst us. I also protected Dr. Shekhar from the rioters when one of them attacked him with a knife, and kept his belongings concealed safely in my loft till the storm had blown over!"

When the *badi* where I later stayed at Bhatialpur was attacked, the

Fuehrer demanded a quota of five heads from that *badi.* Some of the rioters did not want to go so far. The matter was referred back to the Fuehrer who as a compromise proposed that the conscientious objectors should provide hostages for the "good conduct" of the persons whom they wanted to be spared. Accordingly, four Muslims offered to forfeit their lives in case the marked persons should misbehave, thus saving the lives of their Hindu neighbours.

In the adjoining village of Karatkhil, a solitary Muslim courageously stood out and refused to join the rioters. For this the ruffians slaughtered his cow to provide themselves a feast. The brother of the Fuehrer, known in his neighbourhood as a religious head, openly expressed his disapproval of what was going on during the disturbances. When the Hindus of a neighbouring village, who were in imminent danger, sought his advice as to whether they should seek safety in conversion, he told them that they must not change their faith unless it appealed to them on its merits and they felt the inner urge to embrace Islam.

In yet another village, the life of a local Hindu doctor was saved by the fidelity of his Muslim neighbours who said they would kill anyone attacking the house of their doctor and posted guards to protect it. At Changirgaon, where another member of Gandhiji's party, Dr. Sushila Nayar, was later posted, a band of looters came to a Hindu compounder's house and started looting and smashing religious pictures. A glass splinter from one of the picture frames entered into the foot of the leader of the band causing profuse bleeding. The old practitioner thereupon forgetting his own misfortune, took him to his half-ransacked dispensary and dressed his foot with all the care and attention he was capable of. The hooligans were taken aback by this unexpected return of good for evil. The chief ordered his men away and the house was saved from arson—the only house to escape in that locality.

At Razakpur in Begumganj police station, an important local Hindu gentleman, who was very popular among the Hindus and Muslims alike, was proposed to be liquidated. The local Muslim member of the Legislative Assembly and a Muslim pleader thereupon sent him secret warning. A Maulvi sent him his boat and a boatman to enable him to effect his escape and personally helped him to entrain for Chandpur, bidding him good-bye with tears. A few months afterwards, the Maulvi died and the refugee in exile, in his turn, mourned his death with tears.

5

The Noakhali tragedy, coming after the Great Calcutta Killing, made big headlines in the Press and gave a severe setback to the prestige of the Muslim League and particularly the Muslim League Government of Bengal. The latter were anxious to disown responsibility for the happenings but were averse to taking any strong action.

On the 16th October, the Commissioner of Chittagong Division was approached. He talked over the phone to the Additional Secretary, Home Department, about the gravity of the situation. On the 19th October the whole episode was related to the Governor of Bengal and appeals were made for immediate penetration into the isolated pockets of Hindu population. By this time the hooligans had completed their acts of desecration over the whole of Ramganj, Raipur and part of Begumganj and Lakshmipur police stations and established *goondaraj* in the entire area, which was completely cut off from the rest of the world. But the Chief Minister tried to convince His Excellency that the whole thing was "fantastically exaggerated".

When, at last, the military was ordered to move into the interior, it had a most tragic and unforeseen result in some of the isolated pockets. Finding that the military reinforced by two battalions was about to begin mopping up operations, the hooligans got busy afresh. On the 22nd October, *The Statesman* staff correspondent reported that according to information recorded in a *thana* which he had visited, 22 men had been butchered on the previous day. The bodies were half burnt and thrown into canals jammed with water hyacinth to avoid detection and identification: "Every moment counts, and only prompt action on the part of the military can save thousands of lives."[21]

Giving a pen-picture of Panchgaon, a village on the border of Begumganj and Ramganj *thanas* and the surrounding area after the devastation, the same correspondent proceeded: "Once a prosperous village but now a deserted place with burnt out houses standing out as a mute witness to the depredations of hooligans is Panchgaon. . . . Almost similar is the condition of other villages in a *thana* with a total area of 159 square miles and a Hindu population 127,000. . . . According to *thana* report 49 persons had been murdered in the last few days."

The military had their own difficulties. General Bucher, at a Press conference in Calcutta, stated that the gangs of fanatical hooligans "who had organised themselves with some form of plan" started their operations far away from the means of communication and moved further away when the police and the military drew near. Asked why martial law had not been declared in the disturbed areas, he replied that he had no power to declare martial law unless he considered it necessary for the protection of the lives of soldiers. Otherwise it had to be done in consultation with the Government in office. He did not consider that the lives of soldiers in the disturbed areas were in danger.[22]

As for the Government in office, it was concerned only to minimise the seriousness of the happenings and to maintain before the world that nothing very serious had taken place. Abdul Gofran, the Civil Supplies Minister, visited the affected area on the 20th October. He reached Ramganj in the forenoon but found no time to visit the refugee camp, and proceeded to a village two miles away instead, where he breakfasted

with a Muslim who was said to have been a ring-leader in the disturbances. Throughout, he tried to make out that it was the "outsiders" who were responsible for the disturbance and that the local Muslims had opposed it always.

On the 25th October, some members of the Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, giving their impression of a tour of the affected areas in Noakhali, stated that "the happenings were not as serious as they were made to appear. There was no case of rape or abduction of women and *there was not much evidence of arson and destruction of property.*"[23] (Italics mine). On the same day, the Chief Minister of Bengal made a statement to the Press saying that "the situation was definitely under control" and that "most of the news" was "expression of apprehension instead of being based on any foundation in fact."[24]

According to General Bucher, there were about this time 1,500 troops operating in the disturbed areas. There were besides, according to Mr. Taylor, the Inspector-General of Police, 440 armed constables drafted from all districts in the Province, and in addition, a large number of officers. Arms that were being used by the military, ran an official statement, "included machine-guns, bren-guns, rifles and revolvers. They also had a stock of mortars and other ammunition."[25]

But the protection which all this paraphernalia of power might have given was reduced almost to a Pickwickian farce by the attitude and policy of the Bengal Government. Earlier, Brigadier P. N. Thapar had stated that as soon as the shallow water-craft, which had been sent for, arrived, they would "reach every village and house in the affected areas, comb all places in search of hooligans who were responsible for . . . lawlessness and provide relief organisations for evacuating those who might want to leave their homes for places outside the affected areas."[26] But following upon the formulation of Bengal Government's policy, General Bucher, contradicting Brigadier Thapar's statement stated that "obviously" Brigadier Thapar was not correctly reported. "The whole policy was to endeavour to persuade people to remain in their villages and give them security while they remained and to endeavour to get those who had left to go back to their villages."[27]

And so, under the blanket of "military and armed police protection" the stranglehold of the hooligans continued and virtually obtained a new lease of life. The military had no authority to act on their own unless attacked and after a few encounters the hooligans learnt to leave them discreetly alone and kept out of the beat of the armed patrols. But away from them, and in the interior, they carried on much as before and imposed on the minority community a regime of soul-killing, lawless terror and oppression that has few parallels. Before others, they pretended that they were really the protectors of their Hindu neighbours and the devastation was the work of "outsiders" of unknown identity. And this cruel lie the victims were made to endorse and even to repeat

before those who came to effect their rescue and further to say that they were very happy under their oppressors, and forced conversions and marriages were really voluntary! Afterwards, these statements were flung by local officials in the face of the relief agencies that were sent out to do rescue work. In the meantime the spoliation of the victims continued and instances were reported of their being made to acquiesce in things too shameful to mention.

A celebrated case of forced marriage was that of Arati of Panchgharia village. She was forcibly married to the son of a local Union Board president's brother, under threat of the worst befalling her family and the entire Hindu population of the village unless she consented. She acquiesced and the ruffians spared the village. Later, the District Magistrate, Mr. McInerny, accompanied by Makhanlal Sen, a well-known Calcutta journalist, saw her at her would-be father-in-law's house. At first she said that she had married of her own free will. The District Magistrate then took her apart and assured her that he would afford protection to her relatives and no harm would befall them as a result of any statement that she might make. She thereupon confirmed the story of her forcible marriage and, at her request, was taken away from that house to a place of safety.

There was utter confusion, darkness and despair in the affected area. People, who were away from their homes at the time of the riots, had no means of knowing as to what had befallen their near and dear ones as the post offices did not function. There were large numbers of people, including women and girls, still untraced. Families had been broken up and left without a morsel of food to keep them going, or a cooking pot to cook their food in, or a roof over their head to give them shelter. There was acute shortage of food and clothing and an almost total absence of facilities for medical relief in the area of devastation.

In the last week of October, 1946, the Government of Bengal appointed two high officers of the Indian Civil Service, Mr. Simpson and Mr. R. Gupta, to inquire into and report on the actual conditions in the affected areas. Their reports, which were pigeon-holed by the Bengal Government, make revealing reading. R. Gupta's tour diary gives a vivid picture of the stranglehold of the miscreants in the interior of Sadar sub-division of Noakhali district three weeks after the outbreak and under the very nose of the armed police and the military. Here are a few excerpts:

1-11-46. *Dayanantpur*: These people residing so close to the *thana* are in such a state of terror still that they are reluctant to talk about what they have suffered. . . . Only when they were able to be closeted alone with me could I make a few of them talk. The quarters of a Hindu constable of the *thana* who was residing there with his family is among the gutted houses within 200 yards of the *thana*.

Keroa: The same tale here. About 90 per cent. of the Hindu houses

destroyed by fire, all houses looted. Mass conversions. The local Hindu population wanted arrangements to be made for them to evacuate in a body.

Nandanpur: Literally every Hindu house has been destroyed.

3-11-46. *Chandipur*: About 70 per cent. of the Hindu houses have suffered from arson and 95 per cent. from looting.

Shahpur bazar: The only human being we could find was the postman. . . . There was not another soul in sight and all the shops were closed.

At Dasgharia, R. Gupta came across an instance of what later came to be adopted by the rioters as a common tactic, viz., to set fire to the mosques and blame it on the Hindus to harass them in order to compel them to withdraw their first information reports. As R. Gupta's party passed through Dasgharia bazar, one of the constables noticed that the rear side of a mosque was on fire. "The state of the fire indicated that it had been lighted a few minutes earlier. I immediately ordered the constable to put the fire out. Some of us also ran towards the back of the mosque, to the water's edge, to see if we could spot anyone who might have done this. We at once saw two men clad in *lungis* move out on to the District Board road from the waters of the *khal* and run towards the east. One of them disappeared. The other stood a long distance away shouting '*Police shala ko maro*' (Beat up these rascals of policemen), etc. Before the fire had been quite extinguished, some local Hindus came running up saying that a large mob shouting slogans had gathered on the south side of the village and were advancing. . . . They came on brandishing their weapons, *daos*, *lathis*, *tetas* etc." The police fired several rounds whereupon the mob fled back into the jungle. "In the meantime, the inhabitants of the village . . . in a body began to leave their houses with their women and children and such luggage as they could carry, announcing, it would be unsafe for them to remain there for the night and they would accompany us to Ramganj." Altogether about 125 persons started back with the party, 75 per cent. being women and children. All were on foot.

On the way, they were repeatedly attacked by the mob, and the police had to be ordered to open fire twice. After several rounds had been fired the mob dispersed. But only a small proportion of those who had got ready to go could be escorted out. The rest had to be sent back. On returning to their village they were looted, maltreated and subjected to all the horrors of frenzied mob-rule.

Mr. Simpson's report of 5th November, 1946, is more comprehensive. It deals with the conditions in Tipperah district. He found the villagers "disinclined to speak of abduction or rape" but "information as to forcible conversion was readily supplied." In a large number of instances, he was shown the caps which the "converted" were forced to wear in token of their embracing Islam. He found the plea that the conversions were "voluntary" to be untenable. "I ascertained that in some cases,

Hindus whose womenfolk had been temporarily restrained, volunteered to embrace Islam in order to effect their release, but the result of inquiries suggested that people were compelled to become 'converts' under threats of death and other harm." What "other harm" worse than death to Hindus "whose womenfolk had been temporarily restrained" meant can be easily imagined.

As regards looting, he had no doubt that "looting was on a very wide scale" and that even in cases where homesteads were not destroyed by fire, they had been "thoroughly and efficiently looted".

During his visit to the villages, he endeavoured to discover if the assailants were persons known in the locality or whether they were hooligans or goondas of unknown identity from elsewhere. "I was almost invariably told that the persons concerned were Muslims living either in the villages themselves or in the adjoining villages. When I asked for names, they were readily and quickly furnished. *I was told that these persons were ordinary villagers who, before the disturbances, lived a peaceful, tranquil and quiet life, respected by their Hindu brothers.*" (Italics mine).

Morale in the affected areas of Faridganj and Chandpur was "very low". There were large numbers of refugees at Faridganj, Chandpur and Comilla. At Faridganj, on the 2nd November, there were about 6,000 refugees, "huddled on boats and sheltering in huts ashore. Many were suffering from bacillary dysentery and other diseases."

The hooligans had been told by the gang leaders that whatever they did would be condoned as it had the backing of the Government. It was, therefore, a shock to them when later the police and the military arrived on the scene and gave an indication of taking energetic action. To get rid of them an "atrocities" outcry was organised against them and even crimes against the modesty of Muslim women were invented. False cases were instituted against the police personnel as part of a general agitation for the withdrawal of the armed police and the military. Magistrates, reflecting the mood and policy of the Muslim League Government in office, as they understood it, made no secret as to which side their sympathy lay. "I understand," reported Simpson, "that the police authorities were gravely concerned at the accused persons being released on very low bail. . . . A much larger police investigation staff will be necessary and some means should be found to protect police officers from the institution of false cases. I was informed by the Superintendent of Police that 201 cases have been instituted against police personnel and the District Magistrate informed me at Hajiganj that over 100 reports of misconduct in the villages of that *thana* area by the military personnel had been brought to his notice. . . . The opinion of the police authorities is that entirely false cases are being instituted both against police and military personnel and that this and the disappointing effect of release on bail might well result in a lowering of morale and keenness of the subordinate ranks of the police force."

Giving a general picture of the devastated areas, Mr. Simpson observed:

In the affected villages there is chaos, destruction of the homesteads, an absence of any sign of movable property, despondency and apprehension; the few who have remained are anxious to leave. The destruction is so complete that except for sheets of corrugated iron, the looting of which is in progress even at present, nothing remains of the wreckage. The interiors of brick-built houses have been burnt out and the door and window-frames have disappeared in the flames. Large number of small personal temple-huts have been burnt out, images have been pulled down and smashed and at least one large and ancient brick-built temple has been looted and desecrated. In some villages I visited, the few remaining Hindu inhabitants were living on *dabs* (coconuts), bananas, where available, and what is known as *kachu*. The scene at refugee centres such as that at Faridganj cannot be easily forgotten. People are herded together on boats, men, women and children, structures ashore are overcrowded, there is sickness and despair. There is no confidence, sense of security and hope for the future so far as these people think and act.

Under the circumstances, concluded Simpson, there could not, in his opinion, be any immediate repatriation to the affected villages, unless certain essentials which he outlined, or measures of "the same character", were fulfilled. Unfortunately, most of Simpson's recommendations remained a dead letter and never got beyond the pigeon-holes of the Bengal Government's secretariat.[28]

* * *

Gandhiji's friends felt perturbed. What effect would this inferno of utter demoralisation and despair on the one hand and calculated falsehood and deceit on the other have on him? He might react to it by launching on a fast unto death. Wrote Miss Muriel Lester in a letter to Gandhiji from Noakhali: "Not only the happenings here have given them (the people in the affected areas in Noakhali) the shock they are suffering from; it is the discovery that there is no safety, no protection, no moral law which is stronger than themselves. We, non-violent folk, knew that police and military cannot save us; they have just discovered it. It is a shattering discovery and an immense opportunity. They need quiet, strong confidence. . . . "

She referred to the "well-planned quiet Hitlerian net-work of folk" who organised and "*even now from prison seem to be organising*" the campaign. (Italics mine). They would only be delighted at his death. She begged of Gandhiji not to launch upon a fast—not only for the sake of his friends, but for the sake of the miscreants, too, who needed his redeeming presence in their midst even more. "The crowds of (Muslim) boys and even children . . . need a live experience to save them from their present outlook on life. They have taken vigorous part in the riots."

CHAPTER XII

THE TRAVAIL

1

ON A THIN white mattress in his unfurnished whitewashed little room in Bhangi Colony sat Gandhiji cross-legged, discussing his future programme with Pandit Nehru in view of the Great Calcutta Killing and its aftermath. He was contemplating return to Sevagram Ashram. His work at Delhi for the time being seemed to be over with the Muslim League's entry into the Interim Government. Pandit Nehru was very deeply affected by the Calcutta tragedy and the way it had affected the psychology of the people. His sensitive and refined spirit shrank from the very idea of communalism. What filled him with anguish even more than the loss of life was the degradation of the human spirit that had resulted from it. "Even those who never thought in terms of communalism are now becoming communal-minded," he lamented. "The madness has spread."

Two days later came the news about Noakhali. As Gandhiji sat listening to the stories that had come, his mind was made up. "If I leave Delhi, it will not be in order to return to Sevagram but only to go to Bengal. Else, I would stay here and stew in my juice."[1] And so the programme of returning to Sevagram went by the board.

Two friends from Bengal—Satish Chandra Das Gupta, a distinguished pupil of that great scientist Sir P. C. Ray, who had given up his lucrative job as manager of the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works of Calcutta and with his devoted wife Hemprabha Devi had taken to a life of renunciation and service at the beginning of the non-cooperation movement in the early twenties; and Satin Sen, a veteran Bengal leader—saw Gandhiji that evening in connection with the disturbances in East Bengal. Gandhiji told them what was brewing in his mind. "Allow us to go to Noakhali first," they pleaded. "Give us a chance to do our bit and then, if necessary, you can go there."

Sarat Chandra Bose, one of the members of the Interim Government, joined the group a little later. One of the group asked Gandhiji whether he would recommend the method of fasting to check the orgy of communal madness that was spreading in Bengal. Gandhiji answered "No". A valued colleague from Ahmedabad had invited him to immolate himself by launching on a fast unto death: "We believe in the

non-violent way but lack the strength. Your example would steady our wavering faith and fortify us."

"The logic was perfect and the temptation great. But I resisted it and said 'No'. There is no inner call. . . . Fasting cannot be undertaken mechanically. It is a powerful thing but a dangerous thing if handled amateurishly. It requires complete self-purification, much more than what is required in facing death with retaliation. . . . One such act of perfect sacrifice would suffice for the whole world. Such is held to be the example of Jesus. . . . A man who was completely innocent offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act. 'It is finished' were the last words of Jesus, and we have the testimony of his four disciples as to its authenticity. But whether the Jesus of tradition is historically true or not, I do not care. *To me it is truer than history because I hold it to be possible and it enshrines an eternal law*—the law of vicarious and innocent suffering taken in its true sense."[2]

During recent communal troubles a Hindu and a Muslim had braved the fury of the maddened crowd in Bombay and gone down together literally clasped in a fatal embrace but had refused to desert each other. In Ahmedabad "Rajab Ali and Vasantrao Hegishte . . . fell to mob frenzy in the attempt to quell it. 'What came out of it? The fire still continues to rage,' people might ask. I do not think for a moment it has gone in vain. We may not see the effect today. Our non-violence is as yet a mixed affair. It limps. Nevertheless, it is there and it continues to work like a leaven in a silent and invisible way, not understood by most. It is the only way."

"Go forth, therefore; you have my blessings," he concluded. "And I tell you, there will be no tears but only joy if tomorrow I get the news that all the three of you are killed."

"It will be pure joy to be so killed," they echoed.

"But mark my words. There should be no foolhardiness about it. You should go because you feel you must and not because I ask you to."

"That goes without saying," they answered together as they took leave to go forth to face the flames.

None of them were, however, able to precede Gandhiji to Noakhali. Sarat Bose made a flying tour of the affected area in order to grasp the magnitude of the situation. Satish Chandra Das Gupta, on his return to Calcutta, set about to organise and send an advance party of workers, pledged to non-violence, to the affected area. Two of them —Viswaranjan Sen and Bhupal Chandra Kamar—with two other local workers reached Shahpur bazar, the storm centre, on the 30th October. They were warned that if they went without police escort, they would certainly be killed. On the way, one of the two local men was overcome by fear and dropped off. Near Shahpur, the party were stopped by a group of Muslims who interrogated them rudely and searched

their effects. Some of them suggested that they should be forcibly detained. At Shahpur bazar, a Muslim crowd surrounded them. Their number swelled to four or five hundred. Here again, their bags were searched for over one hour. In the meantime the sub-divisional officer of the area arrived. Viswaranjan suggested to him that they should take along some local Muslim leaders with them and meet some of the Hindu victims of the riots who had been forcibly converted and were said to be living in great fear. The officer said he had not the time. "Someone from among the crowd produced before the sub-divisional officer a dagger which he alleged they had found in the bag of my companion during the search. I protested, this was a malicious lie. With a smile the sub-divisional officer pointed out to the ring-leaders that the dagger was too big to come out of our small bag! In a whisper he said to me that he himself was afraid of the mob!"[3]

The two workers continued to stay in Noakhali. When Gandhi Camp was established after Gandhiji's arrival in Noakhali, they joined the Camp as members. One of them, Bhupal, acted as my Bengali interpreter when I was later posted by Gandhiji in a village in pursuance of his "Do or Die" plan of work. The other, Viswaranjan, still continues to be in Noakhali, even after ten years, engaged in his good work in the spirit of the Master.

* * *

"I am trying to take my bearings, to see where I stand," remarked Gandhiji to Sardar Patel on the evening of the 15th October. In his post-prayer address that day he observed that even at the risk of forfeiting their affection and regard, he felt prompted to tell them that their non-violence would be counted as a coward's expedient if it was to be employed only against the British, who were strong, while violence was to be freely used against their own brethren. The Hindus should not harbour any thoughts of wreaking revenge on the Muslims for what the latter had done in Noakhali. He appealed to the Muslim League to turn the searchlight inward. Jinnah had declared that the minorities would be fully protected and everyone would receive justice in Pakistan. It boded ill for Pakistan if what was happening in East Bengal was an indication of things to come.

On the 18th October, at the evening prayer meeting, he referred to the numerous messages which he had received, inviting him to go to Bengal to still the raging fury. He was anxious to go there, he said. He wanted to visit the troubled areas as soon as he was free from his engagements in Delhi. But he had put himself entirely in God's hands.

"Will the Muslims listen to you?" asked Preston Grover of the Associated Press of America in an interview with Gandhiji.

He did not know, Gandhiji replied. "I don't go with any expectation, but I have the right to expect. A man who goes to do his duty can only expect to be given the strength by God to do his duty."[4]

"When do you think this type of disturbances would end in India?"

"You may be certain that they will end. If the British influence were withdrawn, they would end much quicker. While the British influence is here, both parties, I am sorry to confess, look to the British power for assistance."

Divali, the great Hindu festival in commemoration of the return of Rama to Ayodhyapuri, his capital, after the completion of his fourteen years of exile in the forest in fulfilment of his father's promise, popularly known as the Festival of Lights, descended upon a people in mourning. Thousands of homes in Bengal and elsewhere had been darkened by pillage, arson, the death of near and dear ones and worse. Things had been done in the name of religion which made one hang down one's head in shame and almost to lose faith in human nature. Starvation and nakedness stalked the land. On top of it, Hindus and Muslims were fighting amongst themselves. The occasion demanded, remarked Gandhiji in his prayer discourse on the 21st October, that those who were pure should become purer, those who had committed crimes should purge themselves of their sin. "It should be clear to us that this is not the time for festivity or merry-making."

He followed it up on the 25th October—the New Year Day according to the Hindu calendar—with a New Year's message: "India is passing through a most difficult time. As a matter of fact the whole world is passing through a crisis. What help do we need to meet the crisis?... The first requisite for spiritual conduct is fearlessness. Let us make a firm resolve today to shed all fear. Without fearlessness all other virtues are turned into dust. Attainment of truth or non-violence is impossible without shedding fear." Fearlessness did not mean arrogance or aggressiveness. "That in itself is a sign of fear." Fearlessness presupposed calmness, poise, and peace of mind. "For that it is necessary to have a living faith in God."

2

What touched Gandhiji even more deeply than the arson, murder and loot was the cry of outraged womanhood. "It is not death that matters but how you meet death," he remarked at one of his prayer gatherings. "To die at the hands of your brother is a privilege, provided you die bravely. But what about women who are being abducted and forcibly converted? Why should Indian women feel so helpless? Is bravery the monopoly of men?"[5]

The question of the protection of the honour of women from criminal assaults in terms of non-violence had long engaged Gandhiji's attention. He had come to the conclusion that in the ultimate analysis it is not their physical weakness that encourages assaults on women or makes

them fall a victim to the same but a defect of will-to-resist. When a person wants to be violent, physical weakness does not come in the way of its effective use even against a physically powerful opponent. "In truth we fear death most and hence we ultimately submit to superior brute force. . . . Some will resort to bribery, some will crawl on their bellies or submit to other forms of humiliation, and some women will even give their bodies rather than die. Whether we crawl on our bellies or whether a woman yields to the lust of man is symbolic of the same love of life which makes us stoop to anything. Therefore, only he who loses his life shall save it. . . . To enjoy life one should give up the lure of life."[6]

But he was afraid that "the modern girl loves to be Juliet to half-a-dozen Romeos. She loves adventure . . . dresses . . . to attract attention. She improves upon nature by painting herself and looking extraordinary. The non-violent way is not for such girls. . . . Definite rules govern the development of the non-violent spirit in us. . . . It marks a revolution in the way of thinking and living."[7]

What that way of living and thinking was, he had indicated in an article setting forth the ideal of the "twentieth century *sati*": "She would prove her *satihood* . . . with every breath that she breathes . . . by her renunciation, sacrifice, self-abnegation and dedication to the service of her husband, his family and the country. She would *refuse to be enslaved by the narrow domestic cares and interests of the family*, but would utilise every opportunity to add to her stock of knowledge and increase her capacity for service by more and more cultivating . . . self-discipline, and *by completely identifying herself with her husband learn to identify herself with the whole world.*"[8] (Italics mine).

Such a *sati* would ever strive to "make her husband's ideals and virtues live again (after his death) in her actions and thereby win for him the crown of immortality." And since the average wife who strives to attain the ideal of *sati* will be a mother too, "she must . . . add to her various . . . qualities . . . a knowledge of rearing and bringing up children so that they might live to be true servants of humanity. . . . *Satihood* is the acme of purity. This purity . . . can be attained only through constant striving, constant immolation of the spirit from day to day."

No ruffian would dare to cast an evil eye on such a *sati*. "However beastly the man, he will bow in shame before the flame of her dazzling purity."[9] The answer to the women's dilemma, Gandhiji said, would be found not in aping the manners of the West but conserving the best that was in India's culture and unhesitatingly rejecting what was base and degrading. "This is the work of Sitas, Draupadis, Savitris and Damayantis, not of Amazons and prudes."[10]

The Ramayana speaks of Sita as having such resplendent purity that even the mighty Ravana, her abductor, dared not molest her though she was completely within his power. Similarly, in the Mahabharata, Draupadi is sought to be dishonoured by the evil king

Duryodhana, who orders her to be stripped naked in the presence of all his courtiers. Alone and helpless she prays to Lord Krishna:

> O Lord of Dwarika, Krishna, why dost Thou seem not to know me besieged by the unrighteous Kauravas?
> O Lord of Vraja, help of the helpless and the afflicted, do Thou rescue me struggling in the ocean of the Kauravas' wickedness.
> O Krishna, Krishna, mighty *yogin*, the Soul and Creator of the universe, protect me. I seek refuge in Thee from the persecution of the Kauravas.

The story goes that Draupadi's invocation springing from the fulness of her faith and self-surrender was heard by Lord Krishna in far off Dwarika and He came to her rescue so that her *sari* lengthened and lengthened and the wicked prince, who had set about to strip her, had to give up the attempt defeated. And is there not the corresponding legend of Lady Godiva in the annals of the West?

It was this ideal of India's ancient womanhood that Gandhiji had striven to present to the women of his Ashram and through them to the womanhood of India. He instituted a women's prayer in the Ashram in addition to the general one and made those verses of the Mahabharata, embodying Draupadi's prayer in her distress, an integral part of it, and sent them forth into the fray, armed with nothing more than the basic spiritual Ashram disciplines, to take their legitimate share in India's non-violent struggle for freedom. The result, as in South Africa, exceeded all expectations. Not only did the women contribute their share in an equal measure, if not more, in the struggle for independence but they won for themselves equality of political rights and status with men without any special effort.

But of late another ideal had begun to contest the field, the ideal of Lakshmibai, the Rani of Jhansi, sometimes called the Indian Joan of Arc, who outdid all her contemporaries in the valour of the sword. Like the rest of India, Indian women, too, found themselves facing the cross-roads on the eve of independence. The hour had come for them to make their final choice between the ideals respectively of Lakshmibai, and of Sita and Draupadi.

The dilemma that confronted the women of India, Gandhiji felt, was a part of a bigger issue. For ages man had dominated woman. Legislation could remove legal inequalities but it could not touch the root of the evil which lay in "man's greed of power and fame, and deeper still in mutual lust."[11] In spite of the law being against her, woman was co-sharer in her husband's power and privileges. Acquisitive instinct had become primordial in her. It had cramped her outlook and personality and made her virtually prisoner of her narrow domestic cares and interests. Why was it that more often than not a

woman's time was "taken up not with the performance of essential domestic duties but catering for the egoistic pleasure of her lord and master and for her own vanities?"[12] To Gandhiji this domestic slavery of woman was "a symbol . . . a remnant of barbarism mainly".

Since the beginning of time woman had "circumvented man in a variety of ways in her unconsciously subtle ways" as man had "vainly and equally unconsciously struggled to thwart woman in gaining ascendency over him."[13] The result had been a stalemate. In physical strength woman was no match for man. In the exercise of non-violence, however, she could easily outmatch him. But under the "hypnotic spell of man's interested teaching" she had begun to hanker after more attention which did not necessarily mean greater respect. It was a manifestation of the inferiority complex which she had developed as a result of her subjection. "May I ask you what it is that makes woman deck herself more than man? . . . If you want to play your part in the world's affairs, you must refuse to deck yourselves for pleasing man. If I was born a woman, I would rise in rebellion against any pretension on the part of man that woman is born to be his plaything."[14]

If only woman could break through her net of illusions and realise the strength of non-violence, she could turn her disadvantage into an advantage: "Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman."[15] And again: "What can beat the suffering caused by the pangs of labour? But she forgets it in the joy of creation. Who, again, suffers daily so that her babe may wax from day to day?"[16] Years ago, while he was convalescing in the Sasoon Hospital at Poona after his appendicitis operation, his good English nurse had told him of a woman who refused to take chloroform because she would not risk the life of the babe she was carrying. The contemplation of that heroine, he afterwards recorded, had often made him envy woman the status "that is hers if she only knew".[17]

His own contribution to the cause of the emancipation of women had been to present for acceptance truth and Ahimsa in every walk of life. In this woman could be the unquestioned leader. She had only to extend her love to the whole of humanity and forget that she ever was or could be the object of man's lust. And she would "occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader."[18] It was given to her "to teach the art of peace to the warring world thirsting for that nectar."[19]

In forgetting her high calling and trying to ride the horse that man rode, woman had really brought herself down and him down. "No doubt that at some point there is bifurcation. . . . In the form there is a vital difference between the two. Hence the vocations of the two must also be different. The duty of motherhood, which the vast majority of

women will always undertake, requires qualities which man need not possess. She is passive, he is active. . . . He is the bread-winner, she is the keeper and distributor of the bread. . . . Without her care the race must become extinct."[20] He held it to be "degrading both for men and women that women should be called upon or induced to forsake the hearth and shoulder the rifle for the protection of that hearth."[21] It was "reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end." Again and again it had been seen that soldiers "drunk with the pride of physical strength" were not even ashamed to take liberties with women. The administration felt powerless to prevent such happenings. "The army fulfils their primary need and they wink at their misdeeds."[22] Extension of the military system to women, he averred, would bring woman down the last rung of the ladder. "Where a whole nation is militarised the way of military life becomes part and parcel of its civilisation."[23]

Besides, all could not become warriors like the Rani of Jhansi. But all women could emulate the example of Sita whom even the mighty Ravana could not bend to his will. Ranis of Jhansi could be subdued, not Sita. Lest anyone should be tempted to dismiss the example of Sita as legendary, Gandhiji proceeded to cite the instance of Miss Olive Doke, the brave daughter of the Rev. Doke of South Africa, whom he personally knew, and who had gone and lived among the unclad primitive Negro tribes in the heart of Africa without fear of molestation. It was that higher type of valour which he wanted the Indian womanhood to cultivate.[24]

Woman in India was brought up to think that "she was safe only with her husband or on the funeral pyre."[25] Gandhiji's whole soul revolted against that concept. "Any woman would be proud of a man or a woman who protected her honour," he remarked to Louis Fischer. "I would not, if I were a woman. I would say: 'If I cannot protect my honour, who are you to protect my honour, who are you to protect it for me?' Sita did that. She did not allow even Hanuman (the legendary 'monkey-god') to protect her honour. She was a host in herself in her purity which was her main weapon."[26]

But absence of a living faith in non-violence provided no exoneration from the duty of resistance unto death for the protection of one's honour. "When a woman is assaulted, she may not stop to think in terms of *himsa* or *ahimsa*. Her primary duty is self-protection. She is at liberty to employ every method or means that come to her mind in order to defend her honour. God has given her nails and teeth. She must use them with all her strength and, if need be, die in the effort. The man or woman who has shed all fear of death will be able not only to protect himself or herself but others also through laying down his or her life."[27]

The same about the man who is witness to such crimes: "He must not run to police for help, he must not rest satisfied with pulling the

alarm-chain in the train. If he is able to practise non-violence, he will die in doing so and thus save the woman in jeopardy. If he does not believe in non-violence, or cannot practise it, he must try to save her by using all the force he may have."[28]

In either case there must be readiness to lay down one's life. "If old, decrepit and toothless, as I am, I were to plead non-violence and be helpless witness of assault on the honour of a sister, my so-called Mahatmaship would be ridiculed, dishonoured and lost." On the other hand, "if I or those like me were to intervene and lay down our lives, whether violently or non-violently, we would surely save the prey and at any rate we would not remain living witness to her dishonour."[29]

He would rather, said Gandhiji, that India's women trained themselves in the use of arms than that they should feel helpless unless there was someone else to protect their honour. But this did not mean that *he* wanted women to train themselves or be trained in the use of arms. "For me there can be no preparation for violence. All preparation must be for non-violence if courage of the highest type is to be developed. . . . If there are women who when assailed by miscreants cannot resist themselves without arms, they do not need to be *advised* to carry arms. They *will* do so. There is something wrong in this constant inquiry as to whether to bear arms or not. People have to learn to be naturally independent. If they will remember the central teaching, namely, that the real, effective resistance lies in non-violence, they will mould their conduct accordingly. And that is what the world has been doing although unthinkingly. Since it has not the highest courage, namely, courage born of non-violence, it arms itself even unto the atom bomb. Those who do not see in it the futility of violence will naturally arm themselves to the best of their ability."[30] (Italics mine).

What if a ruffian should render a woman or her protector helpless and then proceed to do his wicked will? Gandhiji's reply was that a girl who had the will to resist could burst all bonds that might be used to render her powerless. She who knows how to die need never fear any harm to her honour.

"Can a woman be advised to take her own life rather than surrender?"

"A woman would most certainly take her own life rather than surrender."[31]

"If the choice is between taking one's own life or that of the assailant, which would you advise?"

"When it is a question of choice between killing oneself or the assailant I have no doubt in my mind that the first should be the choice."

In the context of Noakhali there was another cogent reason why Gandhiji insisted that women should be taught to rely on their inner resources only instead of arms whether their own or those of the police and

the military. The military and the police might protect women from abduction but what about those who had already been abducted or who might be abducted in spite of the police and the military? They ought to learn to die before a hair of their head was injured. Indeed, he went so far as to say that a woman running the risk of dishonour should take poison rather than submit to dishonour. He had, however, heard from those given to *yogic* practice, he remarked in the course of the same address, that it was possible by some *yogic* technique to end one's life.[32]

This was no gospel of suicide. Behind Gandhiji's advice that women should take poison rather than surrender in such circumstances was the belief that "one whose mind is prepared even for suicide will have the requisite courage for such mental resistance and such internal purity that her assailant will be disarmed."[33]

Another problem that Noakhali happenings had raised was the future of the girls who had been abducted and violated or forcibly converted and married under duress against their will. What should be done about them? It was a travesty of the ideal of feminine purity, said Gandhiji, to regard such victims as outcastes of society. Abduction and forcible conversion should be no bar to the return to her home of the abducted girl. No purification or penance was necessary in such cases. Hindu society was wrong when it imposed penance on such persons. They had not erred. They deserved the pity and active help of every right-minded man. Such girls should be received back in their homes with open arms and affection and should have no difficulty in being suitably matched.[34]

Gandhiji's firm stand in regard to the women and girls who were abducted or forcibly converted had the desired effect. The victims were generally received back in their families without any difficulty and there were numerous offers from all over the country by young men, who were prepared to shed all prejudice and marry such girls in preference.

Gandhiji's advice to women to commit suicide rather than allow themselves to be dishonoured continued to be misunderstood. Some even saw in it an encouragement to the ruffians. To remove misapprehension he reiterated that women could keep any weapon for self-defence if they wished to. There were two ways of self-defence, to kill and be killed or to die without killing. *They could choose either. But he could teach them only the latter. Arms were a symbol of one's helplessness, not strength.* They were poor defence when it came to the protection of one's honour against overwhelming odds; and when one was deprived of them, generally there was nothing left but surrender. Honour could not afford to suffer surrender to any power on earth. Nobody could dishonour a woman who was fearless of death.

An even more serious danger was of vendetta taking the form of a competition in bestiality and being used as a mask for scoundrelism, as often happens during civil commotions. While Gandhiji strongly

warned his co-religionists against it, he appealed, too, to the sane elements among the Muslims to come out into the open and take up the challenge which the Noakhali happenings had flung in the face of Indian humanity. Otherwise there was danger that all his exhortations might go in vain and the tidal wave of bestiality in the name of reprisals might submerge Indian humanity to India's eternal shame. If the evil was to be effectively stemmed, the sane elements in Islam, Gandhiji urged, should not only speak out their mind, but act accordingly and assert themselves. This warning of his went unheeded with the result that a terrible price had to be paid for the neglect and India's name became mud in the world.

An incident happened just before the evening prayer on the 24th October, which illustrated how when emotionalism is allowed to get the better of our disciplined reason, it becomes self-contradictory and defeats its own end. A crowd of excited young men carrying placards and shouting slogans invaded the prayer ground. They wanted redress for the happenings in East Bengal and wished their "voice" to reach the members of the Congress Working Committee, which was meeting in Gandhiji's room. Gandhiji told them that if that was their object then their voice had not only already reached the members of the Working Committee; it had even disturbed their proceedings! Someone from the crowd shouted that they could not pray when their house was burning. Gandhiji replied that the duty of the owner of the house or his servant when the house was burning was to keep his head on his shoulders and concentrate on putting out the fire. The demonstrators by invading the prayer ground had scared away the women and occupied the place reserved for them in the prayer ground. They professed to be shocked at the women's sufferings in East Bengal but in their excitement they had so lost their heads, that they had themselves failed to be considerate towards the women in the audience! This was a strange way of demonstrating their sympathy with the outraged womanhood of East Bengal!

On the evening of 27th October, Gandhiji announced that he would be leaving for Calcutta on his way to Noakhali the next morning. Sufferings of women, he said, had always made his heart bleed. He wanted to go to Bengal to wipe their tears and put heart into them.

3

In Gandhiji the prophet and the practical statesman met. The prophet has his eyes on the ultimate, the practical statesman on the immediate. When the latter in him came to the fore, he became the leader of men, the unquestioned general who led the hosts to victory. When the former prevailed, he became the "voice in the wilderness", biding his time. Sometimes the two converged on a point of time or on an event. He then performed "miracles" single-handed as at the time of the Yeravda

fast against separate electorates for Harijans. The convergence of the two was only in part on the occasion of Noakhali. His mission was partly in answer to the ultimate goal and partly in answer to the immediate challenge which faced the Interim Government at the Centre.

The assumption of power by the Congress Ministers in the Provinces in 1937 constituted an important milestone in the history of India's non-violent struggle for freedom. Gandhiji felt, they could convert it into their opportunity. They had floated to victory on the wave of unprecedented mass support and mass enthusiasm. They should signalise their coming into power by a few bold measures that would capture the imagination of the masses and make them feel that the new era commenced in contradistinction with the old. These included reduction of Government salaries and military expenditure, land revenue and the burden of taxation in general, free salt for all, free and compulsory education on basic lines, total prohibition, universalisation of Khadi and cottage industries, simplification of administration by cutting out of red-tape and mobilisation of mass effort and mass cooperation to put the destiny of the masses in their own hands and make them feel that they could shape it in the way they liked.

After that it would be an easy next step for popular Ministers to declare that they would not employ the police and the military for the maintenance of internal order, but would rely instead on the active cooperation of the people to isolate and sterilise the anti-social elements. How this could be done was indicated by Gandhiji to B. G. Kher, the Premier of Bombay, who came to consult him about it during his brief halt at Uruli Kanchan on his way back from Panchgani to Sevagram in the second week of August, 1946. An all-India postal strike was in progress which threatened to take an ugly turn. It had caused considerable anxiety to the Congress Government.

"Does it mean that the Congress has lost its hold upon the people?" Gandhiji asked Kher.

"No, but the Congress has not spoken with one voice and that has confused the public mind," replied the Premier.

Someone in the company remarked that some sinister influence was at work behind the strike fever. The motive was not economic but political.

"You should reason with the strikers and the people," Gandhiji suggested. "Warn them of the danger; tell the electorate either to do their part, or choose other deputies; and resign if they or the people do not listen to you."

Kher demurred. They owed a responsibility to the country. Were they to abdicate it and abandon the country to sinister forces that in fact wanted the Congress Governments to go and create chaos? he asked.

"That is the only way in which democracy can function," replied Gandhiji. "It will educate the people. . . . *Once the people realise that the Congress won't carry on its rule by force, they will cease to act thoughtlessly or in*

an irresponsible manner and the sinister forces will be sterilised."

He was convinced that if the Ministers played their part, the people would not fail to respond and an antidote would be found to the menace of communal violence which threatened not only the independence of India but even the conception of India as an undivided entity.

Following upon the Cabinet Mission's refusal to invite the Muslim League alone to form the Interim Government, communal rioting in an ugly form had again broken out in Ahmedabad. Gandhiji's advice to Morarji Desai, the Bombay Home Minister, who came to consult him before proceeding to the site of the trouble, was that he "must go to meet the flames under the sole protection of God, not that of the police or the military."[35] If need be, he must "perish in the flames" in the attempt to quell them as had been done by the late Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, the young editor of the Kanpur nationalist daily *Pratap*, who was killed during the Kanpur Hindu-Muslim riots of 1931 while engaged in his mission of peace.

Finally, when the Congress Ministers took office in the Interim Government at the Centre in September, 1946, Gandhiji again insisted that "the new Ministers must resolve never to use British troops, no matter what their hue is, not even the police trained by them. They are not our enemies. But they have hitherto been used not to help the people but to keep them under the foreign yoke. They should now, as they can, be used for constructive purposes."[36]

The situation was one of extreme complexity. As Congressmen the Congress leaders, who had taken up responsibility at the Centre and in the Provinces, felt bound by the Congress policy of non-violence, but force was the main sanction behind the machinery of administration, of which they had taken charge, and they were prevented from making any effective use of it owing to the lack of homogeneity in the Central Cabinet, and the British decision to keep to themselves the reserve powers of the Governors and the Viceroy, and control over the army pending the transfer of power. But even if all the extraordinary powers reserved to the Viceroy and the Governors were transferred to Indian hands, some of them felt, they could not go very far with their use with the life and work of Gandhiji, whom they had followed for over a quarter of a century, before them. If things continued like that, Gandhiji clearly saw, there was grave danger of self-stultification overtaking them. They were immobilised, strapped to their seats of power. So, leaving them undisturbed, he set his face towards Noakhali to clear the way for them and for his own ideals.

4

Noakhali thus became to Gandhiji the nodal point governing the future course of events for the whole of India. Political slavery of India,

he felt certain, was going to end soon, but would the removal of the foreign yoke necessarily bring to the people freedom in the real sense of the term? To Gandhiji it seemed clear as daylight that the answer would depend upon how the change came. And that in its turn would depend upon the account that his Ahimsa could give in meeting the challenge of Noakhali.

Supposing India produced sufficient arms and ammunition and knew the art of war, what part or lot would those who could not bear arms have in the struggle for independence? Would replacement of the British army of occupation by a national army bring freedom to the masses? "No" was Gandhiji's reply. "A country that is governed by even its national army can never be morally free and, therefore, its so-called weakest member can never rise to his full moral height."[37] He wanted Swaraj in which the fruits of freedom would be shared equally by all. But unless the weakest were able to contribute in the winning and defending of it an equal share with physically the strongest, this could not be. "That can be under Ahimsa only. I would, therefore, stand for Ahimsa as the only means for obtaining India's freedom even if I were alone."[38]

India was at the cross-roads. Non-violence had brought her to the gate of independence. Would she renounce it after entering that gate? It did not need much imagination to see that India would have to wait for long before she could become a first-class military power. "And for that she would have to go under the tutelage of some Western power."[39] The vital question, therefore, was whether in the event of the Cabinet Delegation delivering the goods, India attempting to become a military power would be content to become at least for some years a "fifth-rate power in the world without a message" or whether "by further refining and continuing her non-violent policy prove herself worthy of being the first nation in the world using her hard-won freedom for the delivery of the earth from the burden which is crushing her in spite of the so-called victory."[40] Gandhiji for one was firmly convinced that non-violence of the brave, such as he had envisaged, was the surest and most efficacious means to face foreign aggression and internal disorder just as it had proved itself to be for winning independence.

In his negotiations with the Cabinet Mission, he had objected to the presence of the British troops during the interim period for protection against external aggression and even for the preservation of internal peace. He had called it a "vital defect" in their 16th May plan. He had argued that if the British troops remained for either purpose, their presence would act as a damper on the Constituent Assembly and give its proceedings an air of unreality. Further, if they were kept for such use during the interim period, their presence would "more likely than not be wanted even after the establishment of independence."[41] The demand for their immediate withdrawal was turned down by the Cabinet Mission. They were not sure if all Indians really wanted it. Gandhiji told his

countrymen that their demand for immediate and full independence would not be taken seriously if at the same time they asked for the use of British troops for quelling communal disturbances. "A nation that desires alien troops for its safety, internal or external, or has them imposed upon it, can never be described as independent in any sense of the term. It is an effete nation unfit for self-government. The acid test is that it should be able to stand alone, erect and unbending. During the interim period we must learn to hop unaided, if we are to walk when we are free. We must cease from now to be spoon-fed."[42] Even the issue whether India would be partitioned or remain undivided would depend on their capacity to cope with the menace of lawlessness and chaos, on the withdrawal of the British Power, by the power of non-violence alone without the help of the British trained military and the police. Otherwise, the fear of being handed over to chaos would drive them either to beg the British to stay or to accept partition as the price of security.

Reliance on British power for the suppression of communal insanity, such as of late Calcutta and Noakhali had witnessed, being thus ruled out as being incompatible with unqualified independence, there remained the alternative of "an exhausting mutual fight, independent of the foreign element."[43] Successful mutual strife would, however, obviously be impossible, in the first place because the British would not let them, and secondly because of their general ignorance of the use of modern weapons and their inaccessibility. "We have not even the requisite discipline."[44] As against this, non-violence did not require any outward training or supply of armaments entailing dependence upon an outside power. There was, therefore, nothing left but non-violence to fall back upon. "This is no sermon on Ahimsa but cold reason and the statement of a universal law. Given the unquenchable faith in the law, no provocation should prove too great for the exercise of forbearance. This I have described as non-violence of the brave."[45]

He entertained no illusion that the communal disturbances would immediately stop if British troops were withdrawn. Only he held it to be almost axiomatic that "they must stop much quicker". When the British troops were gone, the majority would know how to behave towards the minority. "*Today even the best behaviour of the majority does not receive its full value, whilst the temptation of relying on British troops exists.*"[46] (Italics mine). By British troops he meant not merely white soldiers but all who were trained by British officers and had been trained to be loyal to the British in India and had often enough been used against the people to crush their freedom.

The people had, therefore, to learn to do without the protection of both the military and the police during communal troubles. It was an abuse of the police, Gandhiji said, to use it to put down political discontent or communal commotion. "The function of the police is to protect the citizen against thieves and robbers, of the military generally

to defend the country against the foreign aggressor; where the people have not learnt the matchless bravery of non-violence."

5

Was the country then to be abandoned to "certain anarchy" or the law of the jungle? Gandhiji's reply was "No". He held it to be a superstition for which the hypnotism of foreign rule was responsible that it was the power of the British military and the police which had given India her internal peace. His frequent wanderings throughout India had convinced him, he testified, that "the seven lakh villages get and want no police protection. The solitary Patel to a village is a terrorist lording it over the villages and is designed for helping the petty revenue collector to collect revenue due to the *Ma-Bap*. I am not aware of the policemen having aided the villagers in protecting their goods or cattle against depredations of man and beast."[47]

He was positive that India would not truly come into her own unless every Indian, man or woman, learnt to become his or her own policeman and "every home . . . its own castle, not in the sense of the ages known as dark but in the very ancient true sense that everyone has learnt the art of dying without ill will, or even wishing that since he cannot someone else will do away with the would-be assassin. . . . If unfortunately the politically minded will not or cannot go as far as suggested here, he must at least shed all fear and resolutely deny himself all protection whether from the military or the police."[48]

The fate of the Constituent Assembly was still hanging in the balance. It was a question whether it would at all be summoned. Lord Wavell had already given his ultimatum. (See pages 255-56). As early as 14th July, 1946, Gandhiji had warned: "If the Constituent Assembly fizzles out, it will not be because the British are wicked every time" but because "we are fools or, shall I say, even wicked."[49] If the people shed their petty quarrels and animosities and forgot communal differences and petty distinctions, the foreign troops would find their occupation gone and nobody would then be able to keep them in servitude. "We are passing through a crisis in our history. Danger besets us on all sides. But we shall convert it into our opportunity if we realise the power of Satyagraha than which there is nothing more potent on earth."[50]

There were not lacking critics who asked what use it was talking about non-violence to people who had never been trained to use arms. This particularly applied to the "mild" Hindu who was by instinct and tradition non-aggressive. Gandhiji's reply was that it was gross self-deception to think that one could risk death if one had learnt and practised the art of killing but could not do it otherwise. "But for the hypnotism induced by the repetition of an untruth we should not so grossly deceive ourselves."[51] It had become the fashion to laugh non-violence

out of court as Utopian; nevertheless he would maintain, he said, "that it is the only way to keep Hinduism alive and India undivided. The history of the Congress non-violence for the last twenty-five years has taught us nothing, if it has not taught us that."[52]

Nor could Gandhiji subscribe to the view that because certain members of a particular community had indulged in inhuman acts, the whole community should be branded and put into Coventry. "The Muslim League may call the Hindus names and declare India to be *Dar-ul-Herb* (enemy country) where the law of *jehad* operates and all Muslims who cooperate with the Congress as Quislings fit only to be exterminated." But all Muslims were not Muslim Leaguers. "We must not cease to aspire, in spite of this wild talk, to befriend all Muslims and hold them fast as prisoners of our love."[53]

Yet, dearer than life itself as communal unity was to him, he was not willing to purchase it by conceding or endorsing what he considered to be intrinsically wrong. Such in his eyes was the two-nation theory on which the Muslim League based its demand for Pakistan. If, as this theory postulated, religion constituted the sole criterion of nationhood, so far at any rate as the Muslims were concerned, then a person automatically acquired a distinct nationhood when he changed his religion. This was, to say the least, a fantastic proposition, and certain very curious consequences followed from its acceptance. People in different parts of the country, agreeing with one another in most other things but professing different religions, would then come to constitute different nations. Thus in every village and in every street there would be two or more "nations" confronting one another. Further, if a Muslim in any part of India by reason of his religion belonged to a nation comprising all Muslims in any and every part of India and separate from all non-Muslims including those adjacent to him, then, as Dr. Rajendra Prasad very cogently pointed out, the question would naturally arise: "To which State does the Muslim owe allegiance? To the State within which he lives and moves and which may not be a Muslim State—not falling within Pakistan—or to a distant Muslim State with which he may have no connection except that a majority of people living in it follow the same religion as he does?"[54] The same question would of course arise also in regard to a non-Muslim living in a Muslim State.

Again, if nationhood was determined by one's religion, what would be the status and political rights of the Muslims living in non-Muslim majority areas that might not be included in Pakistan and of non-Muslims living in the areas that might come under Pakistan? Would they be treated as aliens or would the non-Muslims in Pakistan have to be content with being given the status of protected minorities? And, if crossing from one religion to another affected the nationality and, therefore, the political allegiance of an individual, would not a State be justified in regarding any movement effecting a change in the religion of its

nationals as a menace to its stability and put it down as sedition? It might even provide an argument to an ambitious head of a State for forcible conversion and then good-bye to the principle of religious freedom and religious toleration.

If the nationality of a person automatically changed the moment he embraced Islam, Gandhiji asked, then had his eldest son, who in the span of a few years of his chequered career had changed his religion twice or thrice, attained a different nationhood or acquired new national characteristics every time by his shuttle-cocking between Hinduism and Islam? The very suggestion was absurd. Harilal had remained just what and where he was in spite of the changes in his religious label. Nor was Gandhiji prepared to admit that people belonging to different faiths, e.g., Hindus and Muslims could not, in the very nature of things, peacefully live together like brothers. To him it was nothing short of blasphemy. It went against his entire creed. He could not bear witness to an untruth for anything on earth.

He, therefore, refused to concede the two-nation theory which the Muslim League put forward as the *sine qua non* of any settlement not because he regarded it as "God's will" outside the purview of reason and common sense, as has been suggested by some,[55] but because it was an unreasonable and irrational demand based on an untruth and backed by the threat of force, with no warrant in history or a basis in any accepted political theory. "I would have no hesitation," he wrote in *Harijan*, "in conceding the demand of Pakistan if I could be convinced of its righteousness or that it was good for Islam. But I am firmly convinced that the Pakistan demand as put forth by the Muslim League is un-Islamic and I have not hesitated to call it sinful. Islam stands for the unity and brotherhood of mankind, not for disrupting the oneness of the human family. Therefore, those who want to divide India into possibly warring groups are enemies alike of India and Islam. They may cut me to pieces but they cannot make me subscribe to something which I consider to be wrong."[56]

6

To Gandhiji Ahimsa was not merely a philosophy, it was a technique of action, an instrument of change. He had worked out its rationale in its application to communal riots in considerable detail.

Rioting is a specific distemper, a malaise. Underneath the communal riots lies the psychology of fear which the yellow press exploits and fans into mass hysteria. "A paper predicts that riots are coming, that all sticks and knives in Delhi have been sold out and the news throws everybody into panic. . . . Another newspaper reports the occurrence of riots here and there and accuses the police of taking sides with the Hindus in one place and Muslims in another. Again, the man

in the street is upset."[57] Why should it be so? "What if riots do actually take place and some people get killed? Everyone must die one day."[58] The rational course was to go calmly in the midst of the fracas and tell the rowdies to be sensible. "Even a little girl can go up to the hooligans and tell them to desist. Most probably they will. But supposing they do not and kill her, it will be well with her all the same. It is always well with those who believe in God and try to do His will to the best of their ability."[59]

Hatred has its origin in fear. The two are the reverse and obverse of the same coin. The desire to kill is, therefore, "in inverse proportion to the readiness to die."[60] It is the fear of the opponent that gives rise to hatred in us. But in the dictionary of non-violence "there is no such word as an external enemy."[61] When that recognition comes, fear goes and with that hatred must by itself cease. "Thus his (the opponent's) conversion implies our conversion, too."[62]

The way to overcome the fear complex is not ostrichlike to bury one's head in the sand, but to cultivate a faith that never flags. "To see the danger clearly and yet to remain unperturbed in the face of it, trusting to God's goodness, is true wisdom."[63]

And so we come to the rock-bottom foundation of Satyagraha—prayer. A Satyagrahi relies upon God for protection against the tyranny of brute force. "Prayer is the first and the last lesson in learning the noble and brave art of sacrificing self in the various walks of life. . . . Prayer is not an old woman's idle amusement. Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of action."[64]

Prayer, undoubtedly, requires a living faith in God. Successful Satyagraha is inconceivable without that faith. "God may be called by any other name so long as it connotes the living Law of Life—in other words, the Law and the Law-giver rolled into one."[65] Without it a Satyagrahi will not have the courage to die without anger, without fear and without retaliation. "Such courage comes from the belief that God sits in the hearts of all and that there should be no fear in the presence of God. The knowledge of the omnipresence of God also means respect for the lives even of those who may be called opponents."[66] When passions run high and panic and mass hysteria lay hold of the people, the man of prayer should be able to keep his head above the storm and refuse to sink to the level of the brute. "To be able to conquer anger and hatred and all other baser passions is the fruit of prayer."[67]

Riots themselves provide instances of the triumph of the law of love. During the disturbances at Bombay and the blood-bath of Calcutta, many stories of Muslims having, at the peril of their lives, sheltered their Hindu friends and *vice versa*, were recorded. "Mankind would die if there were no exhibition any time and anywhere of the divine in man."[68]

The true test of Ahimsa or love is fearlessness. "Perfect love casts

out all fear." Conversely, fear is an indication of the absence of love or Ahimsa towards the object of our fear. But it is no use making a show of bravery when there is fear in the heart. It won't work. Instances have been known of a child fearlessly playing with a snake without coming to harm. "But if a grown-up person who was afraid of snakes tried to play with one, it would detect fear in the very touch and probably bite him."[69] It is the same with human beings.

The first step for one who is afraid and is desirous to shed fear is to cease to carry arms. One should put faith in God and depend upon Him to protect one. "Trust in God and keep your powder dry" is a cynical negation of the very basis of faith and, therefore, a contradiction in terms. "The man who was afraid and carried arms, repudiated God and made arms his God."[70]

When, however, one proceeds to apply the technique of soul force to the actual conditions of a riot, a series of conundrums arise. For instance, the actual murderer is very often an ignorant tool, victim of mischievous propaganda. How can we wean him from madness if at the same time we can do nothing to check the poisonous propaganda? Secondly, how can we fight against those who stab people unawares from behind? Lastly, how can we cope with a conflagration, when it threatens to become general, since we cannot be at all places at one and the same time?

Gandhiji had an answer for all these conundrums. True, the murderer is the victim of mischievous propaganda. But even such propaganda can take effect only in a vitiated atmosphere. If the atmosphere is purged of the poison, unscrupulous propaganda will be sterilised. The proper way is to begin with oneself. Truth embodied in the living example of an individual is far more potent than tons of propaganda based on falsehood. "A man of prayer knows no fear. Your prayer is vain repetition if it does not clear the atmosphere of fear, panic and mass hysteria."[71] As regards the miscreant who stabs the innocent victim from behind unawares, it may not be possible to prevent such stabbings altogether. "But if the onlookers are not in collusion with the evildoer and are not devoid of courage, they will catch hold of the culprit and hand him over to the police or to the community to which he belongs."[72] Lastly, it is obvious that one cannot be at one and the same time at all the places where riots may break out. "But one can refuse to encourage them by word, deed or thought. If riots should break out before one's eyes, one should try to prevent them even at the risk of one's life, but never by taking the life of another. . . . More potent than the spoken word is a pure thought."[73] The question is, do we believe it? And if so, shall we act according to our belief?

What should one do in one's day-to-day life to cultivate the non-violence of the brave? The courage of non-violence cannot be cultivated by staying at home; it needs enterprise. "He who trembles and takes

to his heels the moment he sees two people fighting is not non-violent but a coward. . . . In order to test ourselves we should learn to dare danger and death, mortify the flesh and acquire the capacity to endure all manner of hardships."[74]

The minimum that is required of a person who desires to cultivate the Ahimsa of the brave is first, to clear his thought of cowardice and in the light of the clearance to regulate his conduct in every activity, great or small. "Thus the votary must refuse to be cowed down by his superior, without being angry. . . . Assume that a fellow passenger threatens my son with assault and I reason with the would-be assailant who then turns upon me. If then I take his blow with grace and dignity, without harbouring any ill will against him, I exhibit the Ahimsa of the brave. . . . If I succeed in curbing my temper every time and though able to give blow for blow I refrain, I shall develop the Ahimsa of the brave which will never fail me."[75]

The message was nothing new. He had been repeating it before and, when he first delivered it, it was as old as the hills. Only here he was uttering no copy-book maxim but proclaiming what he believed in every fibre of his being. He had made it the subject of scientific experimentation.

7

The word *satya* (Truth) is derived from the Sanskrit word *sat*, the present participle of *as*, meaning "to be", "to exist", "to live". Since nothing is or exists in reality but Truth, *sat* (as a neuter noun) is used derivatively to connote the Ultimate Reality, the First Cause, the Law which governs the universe. Gandhiji, therefore, said: Truth is God, the Supreme Self, the Law and the Law-giver combined into one. It follows from this that where there is Truth there is knowledge (*chit*), enlightenment, and where there is enlightenment there is bliss (*anand*), the supreme state which transcends both joy and sorrow. "Hence we know God as *Sat-chit-anand*—One who combines in Himself Truth, Knowledge and Bliss."[76]

Satyagraha literally means holding on to truth. Hence the power of Satyagraha, soul force or truth force, is the power of the Godhead within us. "God is not a person. He is the all-pervading, all-powerful spirit. Anyone who bears Him in his heart has accession of a marvellous force or energy comparable in its results to physical forces like steam or electricity, but much more subtle."[77]

The Universal Spirit cannot be comprehended by man's finite intellect. But it can be experienced by being merged in it like a drop of water falling into the ocean. To see it face to face one has to identify oneself with all that lives, "to love the meanest of creation as oneself."[78] "Truth is, like God, incomprehensible. But when Truth manifests

herself to man she comes garbed in the robes of non-violence. Truth, ungraspable, assumes comprehensible form in non-violence."[79]

Satyagraha, therefore, also means the power of Ahimsa, non-violence or love. The fundamental essential in the practice of Satyagraha is right thinking. "When the mind is habituated to right thinking, right action follows spontaneously, but . . . if the mind is given to wrong thinking, the right action will be lacking in convincing force, and it will also not bring to the doer all the fruits of right action."[80] Satyagraha without right thinking will never carry within itself "the vital power of faith". Nor will the man, who is not an habitual right-thinker, "be able to depend on himself to act rightly (even if he wants to) at a given moment."[81]

Infallible guidance to a leader of Satyagraha accrues from the clarity of the inner vision, the capacity to discern truth, to listen to the voice of "pure reason", "inner voice", "divine whispering" or by whatever name one may choose to call it. "The divine music is incessantly going on within ourselves, but the loud senses drown the delicate music."[82] The realisation or "*darshan* of truth . . . can only be attained by the man of pure detachment. Anger, greed, pride, fear, all these things draw a veil across the seeker's eyes."[83]

In the concluding verses of the second chapter of the Gita, which Gandhiji called his "dictionary of action", is described the ideal of *sthitaprajna*—the balanced mind or the steadfast intellect. It is a mind in which the impact of the sense objects upon the senses sets up no turbulence; which ever remains clear and serene, like a still-lying lake without a wave or a ripple to wrinkle its surface, so that through its placid depths one can see the smallest particle at the bottom clearly and steadily. Such a mind will remain unmoved and unclouded by pleasure or pain, joy or sorrow, hatred or attachment. The judgment will be always clear, the purpose firm and unwavering. Now, let the slightest spreading ripple disturb the surface of the lake in our analogy, and the view becomes distorted, objects begin to swim and dance. They no longer appear in their true shape, judgment is darkened, purpose does not hold.

Such is the case of one whose undisciplined senses rule the mind instead of obediently serving it as its watchmen and couriers. The impact of sense objects on the senses sets up in such a mind disturbances which may vary from tiny dimples on the surface to raging storms that lash up its limpid depths into an angry mass of swirling eddies and foam so that spiritual visibility is reduced to nil and the faculty of steady discrimination between the pleasant and the wholesome, the unreal and the real, the fleeting and the permanent is completely lost. It is the eclipse of this faculty which is at the root of all error, wrong-doing and misery.

As against this, a person who through constant and prayerful self-discipline has attained a state of perfect detachment and tranquillity becomes one with the Law which is "the way, the truth and the life", and in consequence the vehicle of the Power which the Law represents and which is not outside, or apart from, the Law.

The mind
That gives itself to follow shows of sense
Seeth its helm of wisdom rent away,
And, like a ship in waves of whirlwind, drives
To wreck and death. Only with him, great Prince!
Whose senses are not swayed by things of sense—
Only with him who holds his mastery,
Shows wisdom perfect. What is midnight-gloom
To unenlightened souls shines wakeful day
To his clear gaze; what seems as wakeful day
Is known for night, thick night of ignorance,
To his true-seeing eyes. Such is the Saint!

And like the ocean, day by day receiving
Floods from all lands, which never overflows;
Its boundary-line not leaping, and not leaving,
Fed by the rivers, but unswelled by those;—

So is the perfect one! to his soul's ocean
The world of sense pours streams of witchery
They leave him as they find, without commotion,
Taking their tribute, but remaining sea.

Yea! whoso, shaking off the yoke of flesh
Lives lord, not servant, of his lusts; set free
From pride, from passion, from the sin of "Self,"
Toucheth tranquillity! O Pritha's Son!
That is the state of Brahm! There rests no dread
When that last step is reached! Live where he will,
Die when he may, such passeth from all 'plaining,
To blest Nirvana, with the Gods, attaining.[84]

This does not mean "abolition of the senses" but what is connoted by Laotze's Tao itself, viz., "not to act from any personal motive, to conduct affairs without feeling the trouble of them, to taste without being aware of the flavour."[85]

The laws that govern the power of Satyagraha, Gandhiji maintained, are as objective and concrete as physical laws. There is, however, one important difference between the laws of Satyagraha and the laws of physical science. The laws of physical science are inert laws; those governing Satyagraha are living laws subject to the principle of growth, evolution, adaptation and change. The instruments which a

physicist, for instance, uses consist of inert matter. In Satyagraha the instruments are living, sentient beings with a volition and a faculty of discrimination and judgment of their own, as is also the material acted upon. The science of Satyagraha, therefore, does not admit of being stated in rigid, static formulas or set theories; it represents laws and principles in a state of flux. Nor can the practice of Satyagraha be reduced to a set of prescriptive "dos" and "don'ts", or mechanical repetition of a set pattern of conduct. Often a Satyagrahi is, therefore, precluded from seeing more than the next step in front of him. He does not plan events in advance. He prepares himself for all events by attuning himself to the laws of Satyagraha by dint of rigorous self-discipline, self-analysis and sustained correct practice in terms of truth and non-violence.

Research into the science of Satyagraha calls for infinite patience, perseverance and capacity to reduce oneself to zero. "The seeker after Truth should be humbler than the dust. The world crushes the dust under its feet, but the seeker after Truth should so humble himself that even the dust could crush him. Only then, and not till then, will he have a glimpse of Truth."[86] Humility occupies the same place in the striving for Satyagraha as strict objectivity does in physical research.

A Satyagrahi's laboratory is his own spirit or inner self. The instruments which the experimenter in Satyagraha uses in his research are certain observances or spiritual disciplines which he applies in his own case with scientific precision. The more important of these are truth, non-violence, non-stealing, non-possession, fearlessness, control of the palate and Brahmacharya. They are as simple as they are difficult to follow. "They may appear quite impossible to an arrogant person, and quite possible to an innocent child."[87]

Of these the last, viz., Brahmacharya, must be reserved for separate treatment in another place. (See Vol. II, Chapter XI). Among the rest, Truth comes first and foremost. There is a clear distinction between relative truth, i.e., truth as means, and absolute truth. Relative truth is the truth as we perceive it in relation to a particular set of circumstances. It is not the whole truth. What may be true under one set of circumstances may not be true in relation to a different set of circumstances. To take a very simple instance, lukewarm water is hot in relation to cold water and cold in relation to hot water. In contradistinction with relative truth is the absolute truth—the ultimate reality—which alone is, was and for ever shall be. In its absolute sense Gandhiji identified truth with God. He worshipped God as truth. In this sense truth is the end—the *summum bonum* of man's existence.

Finite man cannot grasp the whole truth, not even relative truth. What may, therefore, appear as truth to one person may appear as error to another. And yet both of them may be right from their relative points of view like the seven blind men of Hindustan in the fable,

each trying to describe the elephant in his own way. Proceeding on this reasoning, Gandhiji early came to the conclusion that the pursuit of truth does not admit of violence being inflicted upon one's opponent. Hence the necessity of patience, and patience means self-suffering. Therefore the doctrine of Truth or Satya, which Gandhiji described by the word Satyagraha or holding on to Truth, came to mean vindication of truth through self-suffering, in other words, love. If we seek to find God's truth only, then since He alone is and all else is nought, we shall "see Him in every thing and everything in Him". We shall then hate nobody; injury done to anyone will be like injury done to ourselves. Thus, while for the striver non-violence is the means, it is also the final fruit and result of successful striving.

As a corollary to truth and Ahimsa is the ideal of non-possession or *aparigraha*. If we love our neighbours as ourselves, we cannot crave for or possess superfluities, when others lack even the necessaries of life, or wastefully use what others may badly need. Again, if we keep anything as our own, we shall have to defend it against the whole world by force if a hungry or needy person should want to dispossess us of it. Gandhiji described the genesis of the discovery and adoption by him of the ideal of non-possession and his own experience of the practice thereof in one of his public addresses in England as follows: "When I found myself drawn into the political whirl, I asked myself what was necessary for me in order to remain absolutely untouched by immorality, by untruth, by what is known as political gain. . . . I came definitely to the conclusion that, if I had to serve the people in whose midst my life was cast and of whose difficulties I was witness from day to day, I must discard all wealth, all possession. . . . A time came when it became a matter of positive joy to give up those things. . . . And then I said to myself: Possession seems to me to be a crime. I can only possess certain things when I know that others, who also want to possess similar things, are able to do so. But . . . the only thing that can be possessed by all is non-possession. . . . "[88]

In the ultimate sense, even the body is a possession acquired by the soul. Desire for enjoyment creates and continues to maintain this encumbrance in the shape of the body. "When this desire vanishes, there remains no further need for the body, and man is freed from the vicious cycle of births and deaths."[89] The ideal of non-possession thus requires that we should lay by no store for tomorrow and use our physical body and faculties not for selfish satisfaction or self-indulgence but for service only. Describing the results that follow from the full practice of the ideal of non-possession, Gandhiji observed: "Those who have actually followed out this view of voluntary poverty to the fullest extent possible . . . testify that when you dispossess yourself of everything you have, you really possess all the treasures of the world. In other words, you really get all that is in reality necessary for you, in everything. If food is necessary,

food will come to you. . . . I have heard from very many Christian people that they got their food in answer to prayer. . . . I believe it. But I want you to come with me a step further and believe with me that those who voluntarily give up everything . . . will really find that they are never in want."[90] This is, however, subject to one condition, viz., complete self-surrender in faith: "God is the hardest task-master I have known on this earth, and He tries you through and through. And when you find that your faith is failing or your body is failing you . . . He comes to your assistance somehow or other and proves to you that you must not lose your faith and that He is always at your beck and call, but on His terms, not on your terms. . . . I cannot really recall a single instance when, at the eleventh hour, He has forsaken me."[91]

Non-stealing, the fourth cardinal observance, is derived from the interaction of truth and non-possession just as non-possession is derived from the interaction of truth and non-violence. For, stealing is breach of non-possession plus breach of truth. He who works not and eats steals. He who takes what he does not need for his own immediate use, and keeps it for himself, steals. "I suggest that we are thieves in a way. If I take anything that I do not need for my own immediate use and keep it, I steal it from somebody else. It is the fundamental law of Nature . . . that Nature produces enough for our wants from day to day; and if only everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in this world and there would be no-one dying of starvation."[92] Logically speaking, therefore, said Gandhiji, he who fills his brain with useless knowledge also steals, as also he who wastes a single moment of his time in idleness. A person who aspires to attain this ideal in full will use his body and talents for the purpose of service only so much so that service, not bread, will become his staff of life. He will "eat and drink, sleep and wake for service alone."[93]

There is a Vedic hymn which runs:

> The foolish man obtains useless food.
> I declare the truth: it will be his death,
> Because he does not feed either friend or companion.
> By keeping his food to himself alone, he becomes
> guilty when eating it.
>
> I—the FOOD—am the cloud, thundering and raining.
> They (the beings) feed on ME.—I feed on everything.
> I am the real essence of the universe, immortal.
> By my force all the suns in heaven are aglow.

"The individual initiated into this secret," comments Dr. Zimmer, "cannot be avaricious. . . . He will share it (food) willingly with his companions. He will not wish to break the circuit by hoarding. . . . Anyone keeping food withdraws himself from the animating passage of

the life-force which supports the remainder of the universe. . . . Such a niggardly hoarder cuts himself off from the divine metabolism of the living world. His food avails him nothing: when he eats, he eats his own death."[94]

As a discipline for Satyagraha, the practice of non-possession and non-stealing has a significance all its own. Particularly in the present era of "the economic man", it becomes the touch-stone and criterion of our *practice* of truth and non-violence in their comprehensive sense.

Control of the palate means that one must eat to live for the service of His creation, not live to eat. The function of the faculty of taste is to distinguish wholesome food from the unwholesome. To restrain the palate is not to kill the sense of taste but to refine and cultivate it and put it to its proper use. What we generally do is to dull it by turning it into an instrument of indulgence and literally eat our way to the grave. Slavery to palate leads to a breach of other observances also, particularly that of Brahmacharya.

Fearlessness is the end result and a measure of our realisation of the ideals embodied in the *panch mahavratas*—the five cardinal disciplines. It is also the foundation on which the successful striving of the striver for those disciplines rests. Fearlessness implies absolute indifference to the physical body and all that goes with it and readiness to face loss or destruction of the same. "He who seeks refuge in God ought to have a glimpse of the Atman that transcends the body; and the moment one has a glimpse of the Imperishable Atman one sheds the love of the perishable body."[95]

The basis of these disciplines or observances, as propounded by Gandhiji, is not any value attached to suffering in itself. Nor is there any element of " '*do ut des*' and '*do ut abias*' the bargain and exorcism that mark the fluctuations of man's mind when he first passes into the state of egocentred selfishness" and which, in the words of Gerald Heard, "is present in Zoroastrianism as well as . . . in Judaism (and) which had such an arresting effect on Christianity."[96]

It follows from this that there is nothing inviolable or sacrosanct about the form of these observances. What is basic to the development of the power of Satyagraha is the principle of the practice of truth as one sees it. While, therefore, the form of these disciplines can and will vary according to the norms in vogue in different orders of society, the pattern of social behaviour, local customs, traditions, religious background, experience and the state of development of the individual and society in question, the one thing which is unvarying is that one's practice must conform to one's belief. There must be complete accord between thought, word and deed.

All these observances are, thus, interlinked with and have their common root in the law of Truth or universal love. (See Vol. II, Chapter XI). The striving for truth consists in practising truth with all its implications as we see it with full sincerity and in an equal measure.

Like its obverse, non-violence, truth is not an abstract ideal or a cloistered virtue, it has to be realised in life. It was Gandhiji's constant endeavour to work out in full in his life all the implications of the ideals he professed. This was his *sadhana* or striving for truth. It made his life a ceaseless round of worship at the shrine of truth which is God.

8

"You must watch my life—how I live, eat, sit, talk, behave in general. The sum total of all those in me is my religion," Gandhiji once told a missionary friend. He had cultivated the habit of standing sentinel over himself every moment of his life, in a ceaseless endeavour at introspection and self-purification. Truth, to him, meant not only verbal truth but truthful living—complete accord between profession and practice, thought, word and deed.

Daily he held a silent court within himself and called himself to account for the littlest of his little acts. Nothing escaped his scrutiny. He gave himself no quarter. In fact it seemed to onlookers sometimes that he carried his self-examination and self-castigation to the length of being unfair to himself and his closest associates. For instance, it had been an old practice of his to sell by auction, after the evening public prayer, ornaments presented to him for the Harijan fund. He had discontinued the practice to save time but it made him feel unhappy to think that he was saving his time at the cost of the Harijans whose trustee he claimed to be, and so he resumed it. Then, on a rainy Saturday evening, prayer was held under a dripping *shamiana* and the auction was omitted as the crowd was much smaller than usual. Afterwards he found fault with himself for it. Did it not betoken lack of faith to fear that the auctions would be low because the crowd was small? His South African friend, Downes, scheduled to speak from a church pulpit at 7 p.m. in Durban, began his address at the stroke of seven with an audience of only one. Before he had finished the hall was full to overflowing. That was faith.

On the occasion of his 77th birthday, according to the Indian calendar on the 22nd September, 1946, a comrade had thoughtlessly arranged to get Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the then Food Member in the Interim Government, to distribute sweets to Harijan children. To Gandhiji it seemed a criminal waste of food when the country was threatened with famine. His indignation flared up and he let himself go. For this afterwards he made a double expiation—expiation for the lapse on the part of the co-worker and expiation for his own loss of equanimity. He was in the habit of giving menu instructions for each meal, the menu being strictly regulated according to his physical condition, conditions of rest and work in prospect, mental strain and such other factors. That evening he scribbled out instructions that the juice of sour limes, instead of the usual orange juice, was to be served to him with the goat's milk.

What right had he to use oranges when he could perhaps do with sour limes and jaggery? In his diary he recorded: "I was angry. . . . I have to consider what my duty is in the circumstances. It seems to be so very hard to maintain equipoise in the midst of this raging fire. My heart-searching continues." To a close friend he remarked: "I am filled with agitation. Why could not I suffer this inner anguish with unruffled calmness of spirit? I am afraid, I have not the detachment required for living up to 125 years. That also explains why Charkha and Khadi are making such slow progress. Success of Khadi is impossible without infinite patience. A burning passion coupled with absolute detachment is the key to all success."[97]

In an interview with the American Press correspondent, Preston Grover, he explained why he was shaken in his oft reiterated belief that he would live up to 125 years: "Not because it is illegitimate. But there are well defined limits to the fulfilment of that wish. . . . That is possible provided you have equableness under every circumstance. Nothing should irritate you. . . . I flared up. . . . I lost my balance. You can use any adverb or adjective you like to describe it. . . . It was then (that) I discovered my failure. This loss of self-control has cost some years of my life, which it will be possible to regain if I regain my equanimity."[98]

On still another occasion during the negotiations with the Nawab of Bhopal, he found himself guilty of an oversight (See pages 267-68). It shook him to his depths. He arraigned himself before the tribunal of his conscience and accused himself of gross negligence, "which is criminal in a public man". Not satisfied with it, he made a confession of his error before the evening prayer gathering. "Friends may say that it was no sin but a mere oversight—a trivial mistake. I draw no distinction between error and sin. If a man commits a *bona fide* mistake and confesses it with a contrite heart before his Maker, the merciful Maker sterilises it of all harm."[99] And as an aid to self-introspection, he took to indefinite silence for all normal purposes, to be broken only to address the evening prayer gatherings, or when it was necessary for the mission on which he had come.

And so, disciplining himself day after day by a rigorous, sleepless self-discipline, he retreated into the depths of his silence to seek the guidance of the oracle within for an answer to the challenge which Noakhali had flung in his face. He shared with his prayer gathering what the voice of silence spoke to him: "Man should earnestly desire the well-being of all God's creation and pray that he might have the strength to do so. In desiring the well-being of all lies his own welfare; he who desires only his own or his community's welfare is selfish and it can never be well with him. . . . It is essential for man to discriminate between what he may consider to be good and what is really good for him."[100]

To some people all this sounded Utopian. "Wherever in the world one casts one's eyes," asked one such sceptic, "there is nothing but

violence and power-politics to be seen. Have you pondered what your Ahimsa can do under such circumstances?" Gandhiji replied: "My Ahimsa is neither maimed nor weak. It is all powerful. Where there is Ahimsa, there is Truth and Truth is God. How He manifests Himself, I cannot say. All I know is that He is all-pervading and where He is, all is well. There is, therefore, one law for all. Wherever in the world Truth and Non-violence reign supreme, there is peace and bliss. That these exist nowhere shows that they are hidden from man for the time being. But they cannot disappear for ever. That faith must sustain the faithful."[101]

To put that philosophy and faith to the test for himself he was now proceeding to Noakhali.

NOTES : GLOSSARY : INDEX

NOTES

VOLUME I

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

1 *Harijan*, March 11, 1939, p. 44.

2 In his *Indian Home Rule*, written in 1909, he actually referred to the spinning-wheel as a hand-loom.

3 Gandhiji had a theory based on his reading of the *Upanishads* that the natural span of a man's life is 125 years and every human being could and ought to attain it by cultivating complete dispassion and faith in the all-healing power of God's name. See Chapter VI, Section 2.

CHAPTER II

1 "Quit India" was an apocryphal and much misunderstood phrase fathered upon Gandhiji; it was really coined by an American Press correspondent in the course of an interview with Gandhiji and caught on. The actual expression used by Gandhiji was "orderly British withdrawal".

"Post-dated cheque on a crashing bank" was another expression wrongly ascribed to Gandhiji in reference to the Cripps proposals of March, 1942. Gandhiji never used it in that form or even in substance.

The "Quit India" demand was explained by Gandhiji in the course of a talk with Horace Alexander, a Quaker friend of Gandhiji, as follows: "My firm opinion is that the British should leave India now in an orderly manner and not run the risk that they did in Singapore, Malaya, and Burma. That act would mean courage of a high order, confession of human limitation, and right doing by India. It was a disorderly withdrawal from there. For they left Burma and Malaya neither to God nor to anarchy, but to the Japanese. Here I say, 'Don't repeat that story here. Don't leave India to Japan, but leave India to Indians in an orderly manner.' "—*Harijan*, July 5, 1942, p. 215.

2 Gandhiji's speech before the A.I.C.C., August 8, 1942.

3 *Harijan*, July 19, 1942, p. 232.

4 In his telegram dated 9th June, 1940, to Lord Lothian, the then British Ambassador to the U.S.A., Mr. Churchill wrote: "If Great Britain broke under invasion, a pro-German Government might obtain far easier terms from Germany by surrendering the fleet, thus making Germany and Japan masters of the New World. . . . If some Quisling Government were set up it is exactly what they would do . . . and the President should bear this very clearly in mind." Also see Churchill's telegram to Lord Lothian dated 7th August, 1940.—Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. II, London, 1949, pp. 355-359.

In reply to a letter by Mirabehn (Miss Slade) from Orissa as to how the people should behave in the event of a Japanese landing, since the British authorities had issued instructions for evacuation from the coastal belt, Gandhiji wrote on 31st May, 1942: "Remember that our attitude is that of complete non-cooperation with the Japanese army, therefore we may not help them in any way, nor may we profit by any dealings with them. Therefore we cannot sell anything to them. If people are not able to face the Japanese army, they will do as armed soldiers do, i.e., retire when they are overwhelmed. . . . One thing they should never do — to yield willing submission to the Japanese. That will be a cowardly act, and unworthy of freedom-loving people. . . . Their attitude therefore must always be of resistance to the Japanese. . . . If the British have retired in an orderly manner leaving things in Indian hands the whole thing can work splendidly and it might even be made difficult for the Japanese to settle down in India or any part of it in peace, because they will have to deal with a population which will be sullen and resistant. . . . It is enough if people are trained to cultivate the power of resistance, no matter which power is operating — the Japanese or the British."—*Gandhiji's Correspondence with the Government, 1942-44,* Ahmedabad, 1945, p. 310

5 *Harijan*, March 10, 1946, p. 37.

6 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, April 9, 1944.

7 Gandhiji to the Government of Bombay, May 6, 1944.

8 Dr. Tej Bahadur Sapru's presidential address at the Non-party Leaders' Conference, April 7, 1944.

9 Gandhiji to Dr. M. R. Jayakar, May 20, 1944.

10 Gandhiji to Srinivas Sastry, May 20, 1944.

11 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, June 17, 1944.

12 Lord Wavell to Gandhiji, June 22, 1944.

13 Lord Wavell's speech before the Central Legislative Assembly, February 17, 1944.

14 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, March 9, 1944.

15 See Chapter *Zero Hour*, p. 257.

16 Gandhiji's Press interview, July 13, 1944.

17 Gandhiji's speech before the Congressmen from Maharashtra, June 29, 1944.

18 Gandhiji's Press statement, July 20, 1944.

19 Gandhiji's speech before the Congressmen from Maharashtra, June 29, 1944.

20 The August (1942) resolution of the All-India Congress Committee had only *sanctioned* the launching of a non-violent mass struggle under Gandhiji's leadership in case it became necessary. In his speech before the All-India Congress Committee, Gandhiji had declared that he would shortly be knocking at the door of the Viceroy to negotiate a settlement and till then there could be no question of civil disobedience. This was on the night of 8th August. In the small hours of the morning on the 9th, Gandhiji and the Congress were imprisoned at a swoop. The contemplated civil disobedience, Gandhiji contended, thus never came off. For this part of the argument, see *Gandhiji's Correspondence with the Government, 1942-44*, Ahmedabad, 1945, pp. 182-86.

21 Gandhiji's cable to the *News Chronicle*, July 23, 1944.

22 Gandhiji's Press statement, July 20, 1944.

23 Gandhiji's Press interview, July 28, 1944.

24 Gandhiji's Press interview, July 21, 1944.

25 Gandhiji's cable to *Cavalcade*, July 20, 1944.

26 Gandhiji's Press statement, July 20, 1944.

27 Gandhiji's Press statement, July 13, 1944.

28 *Ibid.*

29 Gandhiji's reply to questions addressed by the U.P.I., London, July 15, 1944.

30 General Molesworth, Deputy Chief of General Staff in India, in the course of an address at the Rotary Club, in April, 1942, made the following observations: "Everybody in India is asking what are we going to do to keep the Japanese out. From the point of view of the Army in this enormous battle-front we shall hold vital places which it is necessary to hold in order to make India safe, but we cannot hold every one. Therefore, what is to be done for the rest of India where we are unable to put troops or air or naval forces? . . . We cannot arm all. On the other hand we can do a great deal to educate the masses to give the Japanese a great deal of trouble. . . . The army cannot do it."—*Harijan*, April 12, 1942, p. 109.

31 Gandhiji's Press statement, July 10, 1944.

32 *Ibid.*

33 Gregg, *Power of Non-violence*, Ahmedabad, 1933, p. 61.

34 Kumarmangalam's cable to *Daily Worker*, August 1, 1944.

35 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, July 15, 1944.

36 Brailsford, *Subject India*, Bombay, 1946, p. 202.

37 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, July 27, 1944.

38 Lord Wavell to Gandhiji, August 15, 1944.

39 Gandhiji's Press statement, August 18, 1944.

CHAPTER III

1 In a letter which Kishorlal Mashruwala addressed to the Chief Secretary, Government of C.P. and Berar, from prison as soon as he discovered his error, he wrote: "If I had wanted to clear myself only before a human tribunal, I could have advanced several pleas. For instance, the fact that I was thrown off my guard by no less a person than Mr. Amery himself. The speech which he made shortly after the arrest of the leaders on August 9, 1942, gave me the first information of the items of a possible programme. I have since learnt that that was the case with several others also. Mr. Amery was particular enough to add that the supposed promoters wanted the programme to be carried out non-violently. Hence I was desired to examine that programme. I ruled out several items in clear terms, e.g, the looting and burning of offices, banks, etc. My answer in respect of two of the items (namely, dislocating wires and rail-roads) was weak. So far as my recollection goes, the subsequent paragraphs of my answer (which the Government pamphlet *Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances* has omitted to publish) largely modify the first paragraph and indicate my disapproval of even the items declared as permissible. . . .

"But as I do not wish to justify myself, but to clear my own conscience, I have to say that . . . instead of analysing the programme made known by Mr. Amery by a mere intellectual process, I should have looked for light to the higher guide within me. . . . I should have declared myself against the items of cutting wires, removing rails, destroying bridges and similar methods of dislocating traffic and communications in as clear terms as I did about looting and burning."

In releasing this letter to the Press after he came out of prison, Kishorlal Mashruwala appended to it the following personal note: "Though the past is beyond recall, I cannot help feeling sorry for giving credence to Mr. Amery's broadcast and justifying any part of it from the non-violent standpoint. I therefore regret that I allowed myself to be misled and became instrumental in misleading others."

2 Gandhiji's Press statement, July 28, 1944.

3 Gandhiji to G. Ramachandran, July 9, 1944.

4 Gandhiji to Aruna Asaf Ali, June 9, 1944.

5 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, March 9, 1944.

6 Gandhiji's Press statement, July 28, 1944.

7 Gandhiji to Sub-Inspector of Police, Bhusaval, February 4, 1945.

8 Gandhiji to Aruna Asaf Ali, June 30, 1944.

9 In his concluding speech in the All-India Congress Committee on the 8th August, 1942, Gandhiji had said: "Here is a *mantra*, a short one, that I give you. . . . The *mantra* is 'Do or Die'. We shall either free India or die in the attempt. . . . The journalists . . . will openly declare that (they) are wholeheartedly with the Congress. . . ." They should wind up the Standing Press Advisory Committee and declare that they would give up writing under the existing restrictions and the Government could not expect from them a command performance. They should refuse to publish Government Press Notes which were full of untruth. The Princes were to write to the Political Department: "We shall belong to the people from today onwards. We shall sink or swim with them." The people of the States were to declare that they would accept the leadership of the Princes if the latter would cast in their lot with the people, but not otherwise. The Government servants might or might not resign their posts but they should all openly declare their allegiance to the Congress. The soldiers should say to the Government: "Our hearts are with the Congress. . . . We will obey your just orders, but will refuse to fire on our own people." The students were asked to say to their professors: "We belong to the Congress. . . . If you also belong to the Congress, you need not vacate your posts . . . but teach us and lead us unto freedom."

10 Gandhiji's Press statement, August 8, 1944.

11 Ever since the Congress had defined its goal as complete independence in contradistinction to Dominion Status, in 1929, 26th January was observed every year as Independence Day.

12 Gandhiji put the following questions in his letter (June 11, 1944) to P. C. Joshi: (1) What is the meaning of "people" in "people's war"? Does it mean war on behalf of India's millions, or the negroes in East, South or West Africa, or the negroes of America, or all of them? Are the Allies engaged in such a war? (2) Are the finances of the Communist Party represented by you subject to public audit? If they

are, may I see them? (3) It is stated that the Communist Party has actively helped the authorities to arrest leaders and organisers of labour strikes during the last two years. (4) The Communist Party is said to have adopted the policy of infiltrating the Congress organisation with a hostile intent. (5) Is not the policy of the Communist Party dictated from outside?

13 Gandhiji to P. C. Joshi, July 30, 1944.

14 *Ibid.*

15 P. C. Joshi to Gandhiji, June 14, 1944.

16 Gandhiji to P. C. Joshi, July 30, 1944.

17 P. C. Joshi to Gandhiji, September 12, 1944.

18 The Soviet parallel might be cited in defence of the Indian Communist Party's position. "The Soviet State is multi-national State" (Stalin) with 180 nationalities, 157 languages, 11 National Republics, and 22 Autonomous Republics. The Union, it is sometimes pointed out, has grown by degrees and stages into its "present status as an integral State" called the "Constituent Union of Republics". These came together as "Sovereign States with the full rights of sovereignty retained by each jealously and intact" including the important right to secede. But this right, it has been pointed out, is not allowed as a general right to the other States of the Union. Even in this regard, as Dr. Radha Kumud Mukerji has shown by quoting from Stalin's address on the new Soviet Constitution made on November 14, 1936, has the following limiting factors: "There is not a single Republic in the U.S.S.R. that wants to secede from the U.S.S.R. . . . None of our Republics would actually raise the question of seceding from the U.S.S.R. . . . Particular areas are surrounded on all sides by Soviet Republics and Regions; they have nowhere to go if they secede from the U.S.S.R. . . . The Nationality which gives name to a given Soviet Republic must constitute a more or less compact majority within that Republic to be able to assert the right to secede. . . . The Republic must have not too small a population because it would be wrong to assume that a small Soviet Republic with a very small population and a small army can hope to maintain an independent State existence. . . ." — *Indian Annual Register*, 1944, Vol. II, p. 66.

The most vital difference however was that in Russia there was no outside third power. Everything came after the elimination of the third power. It was not brought about by the third power or while the third power was there.

19 Gandhiji to P. C. Joshi, September 15, 1944.

20 Gandhiji's note to the Communists, May 24, 1945.

21 Production figures for 18 months ending June, 1942.

22 *Swaraj Through Charkha*, compiled by Kanu Gandhi.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*

29 The following activities were included in the constructive programme: (1) Communal unity, (2) Removal of untouchability, (3) Prohibition, (4) Khadi, (5) Other

village industries, (6) Village sanitation, (7) Basic Education, (8) Adult Education, (9) Women, (10) Education in Health and Hygiene, (11) Provincial languages, (12) National language, (13) Economic equality, (14) *Kisans* or agriculturists, (15) Labour, (16) *Adivasis* or aboriginals, (17) Lepers, and (18) Students. The list was illustrative.

30 Gandhiji to J. R. D. Tata, October 7, 1944.

31 Gandhiji's interview to Norman Cliff, Mussoorie, May 31, 1946.

32 Gandhiji's address to the Kasturba trainees at Borivali Camp and the prayer speech, April 11, 1945.

CHAPTER IV

1 League Council meeting, July 30, 1944.

2 Gandhiji to Jinnah, May 4, 1943.

3 Jinnah's Press statement, May 28, 1943.

4 Prof. W. C. Smith defines communalism as follows: "Communalism in India may be defined as that ideology which emphasises as the social, political, and economic unit the group of adherents of each religion, and emphasises the distinction, even the antagonism, between such groups. . . ."—*Modern Islam in India*, Lahore, 1943, p. 185.

5 Casey, *An Australian in India*, London, 1947, p. 75.

6 Quoted in Dutt, *India Today*, p. 389.

7 Graham, *Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan*, p. 40.

8 Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, p. 173.

9 Hunter quoted in Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, Lahore, 1943, p. 191.

10 Mehta and Patwardhan, *The Communal Triangle*, Allahabad, 1942, p. 88.

11 Morley's Recollections, Vol. II, pp. 170-71.

12 Lady Minto's Diary, pp. 28-29.

13 Montagu and Chelmsford, *Proposals for Indian Constitutional Reforms*, quoted in Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, Lahore, 1943, p. 212.

14 The Turkish Sultan used to be regarded by the Muslim world as their Caliph or spiritual head. During World War I, the British Premier, Lloyd George, gave a pledge that the integrity of Turkey would be maintained and the sacred places of Islam would remain with the acknowledged head of the Muslim religion. But after the war, the Turkish Empire was dismembered and deprived of her Arabian provinces. This meant violation of the Caliphate or the Khilafat since the Islamic law required that the Caliph must exercise temporal power over the "Island of Arabia" in order to be able to protect the holy places of Islam. This was regarded by the Indian Muslims as a breach of faith and constituted the "Khilafat Wrong". Gandhiji canalised their resentment into the non-violent non-cooperation movement for the redress of the "triple wrong" of (1) the Khilafat, (2) Amritsar massacre (at Jallianwala Bag in 1919, following upon the proclamation of Martial Law by General Dyer, when six hundred and odd unarmed people trapped in an enclosed space with a single exit which the General's troops had blocked were killed and thrice as many wounded as a result of firing — the firing ceasing only when the ammunition was exhausted), and (3) the denial of Swaraj.

15 Lord Olivier's letter to *The Times*, London, July 10, 1926.

16 *Birkenhead: The Last Phase*, Vol. II, pp. 245-46.

17 *Ibid*, p. 250.

18 *Ibid*, p. 254.

19 *Ibid*, p. 255.

20 The Muslim League expelled from its membership one member, Sir Sultan Ahmed, in September, 1941, when he joined the Viceroy's Executive Council; and three Leaguers resigned from the subsidiary National Defence Council as Muslims after they had entered it as Provincial Premiers.

21 Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, Lahore, 1943, p. 294.

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid*, p. 292.

24 Arthur Moore's article in the *Tribune*, quoted in R. N. Khanna, *Gandhiji's Fight for Freedom*, Lahore, 1944, p. 31.

25 Jinnah's Press statement, August 5, 1944.

26 Lord Wavell to Gandhiji, August 15, 1944.

27 *The Times*, London, quoted in *Gandhi-Jinnah Talks*, Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 1944, p. 58.

28 The leader of the picketers afterwards explained before the police that the dagger was meant for defence against the Khaksars who had threatened that they would hold a counter demonstration at Sevagram at the same time.

29 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 11, 1944.

30 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 11, 1944.

31 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 14, 1944.

32 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 10, 1944.

33 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 15, 1944.

34 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 10, 1944.

35 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 14, 1944.

36 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 10, 1944.

37 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 11, and September 14, 1944.

38 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 14, 1944.

39 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 15, 1944.

40 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 11, and September 15, 1944.

41 The expression "Pakistan" was understood to consist of P (for Punjab), A (for Afghan Provinces—N.-W.F.P.), K (for Kashmir), S (for Sind) and "istan" (for Baluchistan)—areas intended to be included in it.

42 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 17, 1944.

43 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 22, 1944.

44 *Ibid.*

45 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 15, 1944.

46 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 21, 1944.

47 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 15, 1944.

48 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 17, 1944.

49 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 15, 1944.

50 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 17, 1944.

51 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 15, 1944.

52 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 17, 1944.

53 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 19, 1944.

54 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 24, and September 26, 1944.

55 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 19, 1944.

56 *Ibid.*

57 Gandhiji in Press Conference, September 18, 1944.

58 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 24, 1944.

59 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 21, 1944.

60 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 21, 1944.

61 Gandhiji's note to Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, February 25, 1945.

62 *Ibid.*

63 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 26, 1944.

64 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 17, 1944.

65 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 25, 1944.

66 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 26, 1944.

67 Gandhiji to Jinnah, September 25, 1944.

68 Jinnah to Gandhiji, September 26, 1944.

69 The following is the relevant extract from the Congress Working Committee's resolution of 2nd April, 1942: "The Committee cannot think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will. While recognising this principle, the Committee feel that every effort should be made to create conditions which would help the different units in developing a common and cooperative national life."

70 Dr. Jayakar to Gandhiji, September 29, 1944.

CHAPTER V

1 Gandhiji's Press statement, September 28, 1944.

2 Rowlands Committee's Report for "improvement of the administration" in Bengal, commented: "So widespread has corruption become, and so defeatist is the attitude taken towards it, that we think that the most drastic steps should be taken to stamp out the evil which has corrupted the public service and the public morals. Anything less is a denial of justice to the poor people of the Province, who comprise the bulk of the population and who, in the end, have to pay for the bribes which enrich the unscrupulous and the dishonest." (Chapter VII, para 219).—Quoted in *Indian Annual Register*, 1944, Vol. I, p. 94.

3 Gandhiji to Carl Heath, November 13, 1944.

4 Gandhiji's Press statement, January 10, 1945.

5 Gandhiji's Press statement, October 21, 1944.

6 On September 5, 1947, Mudie wrote to Jinnah: "We had, from our point of view, a successful meeting with Nehru, Patel and company. . . . Patel kept silence for the first three hours and then said that we were all wasting our time, and delivered a lecture on how things should have been done months ago. . . . He was really getting at Nehru, who sat with closed eyes half asleep. After the meeting when

my A.D.C. was waiting to show Trivedi and Patel into their car he heard the following conversation:

'Trivedi: Panditji looks quite done up.

'Patel: So, he deserves to be, flying all over the country and making fools of us all.'

"I hope that we have now seen an end of the visits to this Province of Nehru and his fellow politicians."—Khosla, *Stern Reckoning*, Madras, pp. 315-16.

7 Gandhiji's Press statement, May 6, 1945.

8 G. D. Birla to Gandhiji, May 7, 1945.

9 Gandhiji to G. D. Birla, May 8, 1945.

10 Gandhiji to J. R. D. Tata, May 10, 1945.

11 Gandhiji in an interview with Avinashlingam Chettiar, April 24, 1945.

12 Gandhiji's Press statement, March 31, 1945.

13 Gandhiji to Dr. Subbaroyan, May 21, 1945.

14 Gandhiji to Dr. Subbaroyan, May 31, 1945.

15 Gandhiji to Mohan Kumarmangalam, June 2, 1945.

16 Gandhiji to Dr. Syed Mahmud, January 1, 1945.

17 Gandhiji to Rajaji, June 6, 1945.

18 Gandhiji to Sarojini Naidu, June 9, 1945.

19 Gandhiji to Sarojini Naidu, June 16, 1945.

20 Gandhiji to Lilamani Naidu, June 16, 1945.

21 Gandhiji to Shriramulu, May 29, 1945.

22 Gandhiji's letter, October 30, 1944.

23 Gandhiji to Richard Symonds, January 12, 1945.

24 Since 1919, India had observed the week from 6th to 13th April as the "National Week" by fasting on the opening and closing days of the week and engaging in intensive constructive work during the week. In 1919, 6th of April had been observed as a day of protest to mark the launching of all-India Satyagraha against the repressive "seditious crimes" legislation known as the Rowlatt Act by fasting, prayer and hartal. 13th April, the "Black Friday", witnessed the Jalianwala Bag massacre.

25 Mrs. Roosevelt's reply through Mr. Howard Donovan, the American Consul, Bombay, April 29, 1945.

26 Gandhiji to Maurice Frydman, July 28, 1942.

27 Gandhiji's Press statement, April 17, 1945.

28 Bhulabhai Desai's Press statement, September 16, 1946.

29 Gandhiji to Bhulabhai Desai, January 5, 1945.

30 Bhulabhai Desai to Gandhiji, February 1, 1945.

31 Liaquat Ali Khan's Press statement, September 18, 1945.

32 *Ibid.*

33 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, June 15, 1945.

34 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, June 16, 1945.

35 *Ibid.*

36 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, June 17, 1945.

37 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, June 18, 1945.

38 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, July 8, 1945.
39 Jinnah to Lord Wavell, July 7, 1945.
40 Jinnah to Lord Wavell, July 9, 1945.
41 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, July 15, 1945.
42 Jinnah's Press interview, July 14, 1945.
43 Dr. Jayakar to Gandhiji, July 19, 1945.
44 Gandhiji's interview with Francis Sayer, July 14, 1945.

CHAPTER VI

1 Gandhiji's Press statement, August 4, 1945.
2 Gandhiji's speech before the meeting of the Executive Committee of All-India Spinners' Association, November 27 and 28, 1945.
3 Gandhiji's speech before the Sevagram trainees, November 22, 1945.
4 *Harijan*, March 17, 1946, p. 44.
5 *Ibid.*
6 *Ibid.*
7 Rajaji to Gandhiji, March 31, 1946.
8 *Harijan*, April 7, 1946, p. 69.
9 *Ibid.*
10 *Ibid*, p. 68.
11 *Ibid.*
12 *Ibid.*
13 Gandhiji, *Key to Health*, Ahmedabad, 1948, p. 75.
14 *Ibid*, p. 77.
15 *Harijan*, April 7, 1946, p. 68.
16 *Harijan*, February 24, 1946, p. 19.
17 *Harijan*, April 7, 1946, p. 72.
18 *Harijan*, September 1, 1946, p. 286.
19 *Ibid*, p. 292.
20 *Harijan*, August 11, 1946, p. 255.
21 Gandhiji to Manibhai, November 12, 1947.
22 Gandhiji to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, August 4, 1945.
23 Lord Pethick-Lawrence to Gandhiji, August 14, 1945.
24 Casey, *An Australian in India*, London, 1947, p. 61.
25 *Ibid*, p. 61.
26 *Ibid*, pp. 60-62.
27 Gandhiji to Casey, December 8, 1945.
28 Casey's broadcast, December 8, 1945.
29 Casey to Gandhiji, December 9, 1945.
30 Gandhiji to Casey, December 8, 1945.
31 Gandhiji to Casey, December 12, 1945.
32 Casey, *An Australian in India*, London, 1947, p. 61.
33 Gandhiji to Rathindranath Tagore, December 22, 1945.
34 Prayer speech, December 24, 1945.
35 Gandhiji's Press statement, July 18, 1945.

36 *Harijan*, March 3, 1946, p. 26.
37 *Ibid*, p. 29.
38 Gandhiji to Sardar Patel, January 1, 1946.
39 *Harijan*, February 10, 1946, p. 5.
40 *Ibid.*
41 *Ibid*, p. 4.
42 *Ibid.*
43 Rajaji to Gandhiji, March 3, 1946.
44 Gandhiji to Rajaji, March 11, 1946.
45 Rajaji to Gandhiji, March 13, 1946.
46 George Abell to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, February 15, 1946.
47 Lord Wavell to Gandhiji, March 13, 1946.
48 Gandhiji to George Abell, March 14, 1946.
49 *Harijan*, March 3, 1946, p. 25.
50 *Harijan*, February 10, 1946, p. 11.
51 *Ibid.*
52 *Ibid.*
53 Sir Stafford Cripps to Gandhiji, December 19, 1945.
54 Gandhiji to Sir Stafford Cripps, January 12, 1946.
55 Prayer speech, March 11, 1946.
56 *Harijan*, March 31, 1946, p. 61.
57 *Harijan*, March 3, 1946, p. 31.
58 *Ibid*, p. 30.
59 *Ibid*, p. 31.
60 *Ibid.*
61 *Ibid.*
62 *Ibid.*
63 *Harijan*, April 14, 1946, p. 80.
64 *Harijan*, April 7, 1946, p. 75.
65 *Ibid.*
66 *Ibid.*

PART TWO

CHAPTER VII

1 Sir Stafford Cripps to Gandhiji, May 5, 1946.
2 Sir Stafford Cripps to Gandhiji, March 28, 1946.
3 Sir Stafford Cripps to Gandhiji, August 28, 1946.
4 *Young India*, August 6, 1925, pp. 274-75.
5 Gandhiji quoted in Prabhu and Rao, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, 1946, p. 38.
6 *Harijan*, June 24, 1933, p. 5.
7 *Harijan*, April 28, 1946, p. 109.
8 *Ibid*, p. 110.
9 Gandhiji to the Viceroy's Private Secretary, October 29, 1945.

10 Congress Working Committee's resolution, December 11, 1945.

11 *Harijan*, March 10, 1946, p. 36.

12 *Harijan*, April 28, 1946, pp. 102-3.

13 *Harijan*, May 5, 1946, p. 116.

14 One hank is equal to 840 yards of yarn.

15 Pandit Nehru's Foreword to *To a Gandhian Capitalist*, Bombay, 1951, being a collection of Gandhiji's letters to Seth Jamnalal Bajaj.

16 *Young India*, January 20, 1927, p. 21.

17 *Harijan*, June 16, 1946.

18 Lord Pethick-Lawrence to Gandhiji, June 10, 1946.

CHAPTER VIII

1 Gopalswami Ayyangar's notes of his interview with Sir Stafford Cripps.

2 Maulana Azad to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, April 28, 1946.

3 Gandhiji to Sir Stafford Cripps, April 29, 1946.

4 Maulana Azad to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, May 6, 1946.

5 Maulana Azad's Press statement, July 14, 1945.

6 Maulana Azad to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, May 6, 1946.

7 Ramsay MacDonald, *Government of India*, pp. 126-27.

8 George Abell to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, April 1, 1946.

9 Gandhiji to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, April 2, 1946.

10 Gandhiji to George Abell, May 3, 1946.

11 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, May 11, 1946.

12 Maulana Azad to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, May 20, 1946.

13 *Harijan*, May 26, 1946, p. 152.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Gandhiji to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, May 19, 1946.

16 Lord Wavell to Maulana Azad, June 15, 1946.

17 *Harijan*, May 26, 1946, p. 152.

18 Statement by the Cabinet Mission, May 25, 1946.

19 Butler Committee's Report quoted in Pyarelal, *Status of Indian Princes*, Ahmedabad, 1941, p. 33.

20 Quoted in Pyarelal, *Status of Indian Princes*, Ahmedabad, 1941, p. 38.

21 *Ibid*, p. 42.

22 *Ibid*, p. 39.

23 *Ibid*, p. 41.

24 Gandhiji to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, May 20, 1946.

25 *Ibid.*

26 Cabinet Mission's statement, May 25, 1946.

27 Lord Pethick-Lawrence to Maulana Azad, May 22, 1946.

28 Cabinet Mission's statement, May 25, 1946.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Lord Pethick-Lawrence to Gandhiji, May 21, 1946.

31 *Harijan*, June 16, 1946, p. 184.

32 *Harijan*, June 23, 1946, p. 199.

33 *Ibid.*
34 Gandhiji to Lord Wavell, June 12, 1946.
35 Gandhiji to Sir Stafford Cripps, June 13, 1946.
36 Sir Stafford Cripps to Gandhiji, June 13, 1946.
37 *Harijan,* June 23, 1946, p. 186.
38 *Ibid.*
39 Prayer speech, June 14, 1946.
40 *The Statesman,* June 13, 1946.
41 *Harijan,* June 23, 1946, p. 188.
42 *Ibid.*
43 Macaulay, *History of England.*
44 Prayer speech, June 25, 1946.
45 *Ibid.*
46 Gandhiji's interview to Norman Cliff, June 29, 1946.
47 Norman Cliff to Gandhiji, July 4, 1946.

CHAPTER IX

1 *Harijan,* July 21, 1946, p. 232.
2 *Harijan,* May 19, 1946, p. 134.
3 *Harijan,* August 4, 1946, p. 247.
4 *Ibid,* p. 245.
5 *Ibid,* p. 247.
6 *Ibid.*
7 *Harijan,* August 11, 1946, p. 253.
8 *Harijan,* August 18, 1946, p. 263.
9 Sir Stafford Cripps' speech in the Parliament, July 18, 1946.
10 *Hindusthan Standard,* August 1, 1946.
11 *Indian Annual Register,* Vol. II, 1946, p. 69.
12 *Leader,* August 5, 1946.
13 Khosla, *Stern Reckoning,* Madras, p. 43.
14 *The Statesman,* August 24, 1946.
15 *The Statesman,* August 20, 1946.
16 The following is the relevant extract from the telegram sent by the representative of *Sunday Express,* London, on August 24, from Calcutta: "Suhrawardy is contradictory, 'I believe in the sincerity of Cabinet Mission. I don't believe British ever intended to get out of India. Now they must remain. If British army were withdrawn there would be massacre.' Suhrawardy insists the Hindus started the rioting. 'The Muslims intended only peaceful demonstration, they were not ready to fight. Only the Hindus had weapons—guns, lathis, stones, boiling water and bottles of acid which they flung over Muslims from roof-tops. They had petrol and transportation more.' "
17 *The Statesman,* August 27, 1946.
18 *Harijan,* September 8, 1946, p. 305.
19 *Harijan,* September 15, 1946, p. 312.
20 *Harijan,* October 13, 1946, p. 345.

21 *Harijan*, September 15, 1946, p. 312.
22 *Harijan*, September 8, 1946, p. 396.
23 *Ibid.*
24 *Ibid.*
25 *Ibid.*
26 *Harijan*, September 15, 1946, p. 312.
27 *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, September 12, 1946.
28 *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, September 19, 1946.

CHAPTER X

1 Pandit Nehru's directive to the Congressmen, September 18, 1946.
2 Pandit Nehru to Lord Wavell, July 23, 1946.
3 Lord Wavell to Pandit Nehru, August 19, 1946.
4 Lord Wavell to Pandit Nehru, August 22, 1946.
5 Lord Wavell to Pandit Nehru, August 29, 1946.
6 *Ibid.*
7 Pandit Nehru to Lord Wavell, August 29, 1946.
8 Pandit Nehru to Lord Wavell, September 4, 1946.
9 *Ibid.*
10 Lord Wavell to Gandhiji, September 27, 1946.
11 Lord Wavell to Gandhiji, September 29, 1946.
12 Pandit Nehru to Lord Wavell, October 15, 1946.
13 Pandit Nehru to Lord Wavell, October 23, 1946.
14 *Ibid.*
15 Pandit Nehru to Lord Wavell, October 15, 1946.
16 Pandit Nehru to Lord Wavell, October 23, 1946.
17 *Ibid.*
18 *New York Herald Tribune*, October 29, 1946.
19 Ghazanfar Ali Khan's speech at Lahore, 19th October, 1946.

CHAPTER XI

1 Telegram released by the Bengal Press Advisory Committee, October 16, 1946.

2 *The Statesman*, October 24, 1946.
3 *The Statesman*, October 20, 1946.
4 *Hindusthan Standard*, October 27, 1946.
5 *The Statesman*, October 27, 1946.
6 *Hindusthan Standard*, November 8, 1946.

7 Thomson: *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Noakhali, 1914 to 1919.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 Under the humanitarian clause of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact free leave was given to individuals and families to produce salt without any payment of tax, for local use, provided it was carried by head-loads and no transport was used.

10 Statement dated November 7, 1946, by Kshitish Chandra Rai Chowdhury, Vice-Chairman and Chairman-in-charge, Noakhali municipality.

11 *Ibid.*

12 Eye-witness account given by Chittaranjan Roy Chowdhury in his statement dated October 28, 1946.

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*

15 In 1948, after Gandhiji's death, the muzzle-loader was planted in my camp by one of Ghulam Sarwar's men as a part of a conspiracy to drive out the Gandhi peace mission from Noakhali. It was identified from its number as being the gun that had been used by Kali Prasanna Raut in the defence of Chowdhurybadi. The incident later formed subject of an inquiry by a Minister of the East Bengal Government when the whole story of the conspiracy was told him by a local Muslim, who had it directly from the person who had handed the gun to the conspirators.

16 The statement on Sandwip is based on the report of Dr. Amiya Chakravarty, dated December 15, 1946, which he submitted to Gandhiji after paying a visit to the island.

17 English translation of an original certificate of "conversion" that was given to Gandhiji on his arrival in Noakhali ran: "Golam Rahman, father's name Abdur Rahman. The said person has accepted holy Islam on 15-10-46. His former name was Satyendrakumar Mujumdar. His present name is Golam Rahman. Be it known that their whole family has accepted Islam. Sd. Md. Hamidullah, Vill. Ayubpur."

18 Dr. Amiya Chakravarty's letter to Pyarelal, November, 1946.

19 Haren Ghosh's written statement to Gandhiji, November 7, 1946.

20 Hirendra Nath Nandy's report to Gandhiji, February 2, 1947.

21 *The Statesman*, October 24, 1946.

22 *The Statesman*, October 27, 1946.

23 *The Statesman*, October 26, 1946.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *The Statesman*, October 21, 1946.

26 *The Statesman*, October 25, 1946.

27 *The Statesman*, October 27, 1946.

28 Mr. Simpson suggested the following measures to be taken: (a) Establishment of military posts throughout the area to establish confidence; (b) strict instructions to be given that unless the law otherwise provides, persons arrested in connection with the disturbances should not be released on bail as there was grave apprehension in the villages and in refugee camps that accused persons released on bail "will return to the villages and murder complainants and informants"; (c) an immediate increase of investigating staff in each *thana*, the personnel to be carefully selected from other districts and known to be reliable, the complaint in the villages being that without immediate investigation of cases and arrests, offenders are encouraged and a fresh outbreak is inevitably worse than the first; (d) the judicial machinery to be set in motion as soon as possible. There should be special procedure provided for the disposal of cases expeditiously; (e) the presidents of the Union Boards should not be entrusted with the distribution unless they have shown by their conduct during the disturbances that they were willing to assist people, regardless of community and further that presidents of Unions "who did nothing to assist people during the disturbances should be

removed." Finally it was suggested that civil officers should tour widely. "People in villages and refugee camps do not know what is occurring, whether attacks have ceased. Rumours are widespread. . . . People want advice and assurance by officers of understanding and sympathy."

CHAPTER XII

1 *Harijan,* October 27, 1946, p. 372.
2 *Ibid,* pp. 372-73.
3 Vishwaranjan Sen's report of his tour of the riot-affected areas, November 2, 1946.
4 *Harijan,* November 3, 1946, p. 382.
5 Prayer speech, October 17, 1946.
6 *Harijan,* March 1, 1942, p. 60.
7 *Harijan,* December 31, 1938, p. 408.
8 *Young India,* May 21, 1931, p. 115.
9 *Harijan,* March 1, 1942, p. 60.
10 *Young India,* October 17, 1929, p. 340.
11 *Ibid.*
12 Gandhiji, *Women and Social Injustice,* Ahmedabad, 1947, p. 187.
13 *Young India,* October 17, 1929, p. 340.
14 *Young India,* December 8, 1927, p. 406.
15 *Young India,* April 10, 1930, p. 121.
16 *Harijan,* February 24, 1940, pp. 13-14.
17 *Ibid,* p. 14.
18 *Ibid.*
19 *Ibid.*
20 *Ibid,* p. 13.
21 *Ibid.*
22 *Harijan,* March 1, 1942, p. 60.
23 *Ibid.*
24 Prayer speech, October 17, 1946.
25 Prayer speech, October 18, 1946.
26 Louis Fischer's interview with Gandhiji, July 18, 1946.
27 *Harijan,* March 1, 1942, p. 60.
28 *Ibid,* p. 61.
29 *Ibid.*
30 *Harijan,* February 9, 1947, p. 13.
31 *Ibid.*
32 Prayer speech, October 18, 1946.
33 *Harijan,* February 9, 1947, p. 13.
34 *Harijan,* November 3, 1946, p. 387.
35 *Harijan,* July 14, 1946, p. 219.
36 *Harijan,* September 8, 1946, p. 296.
37 *Harijan,* May 5, 1946, p. 116.
38 *Harijan,* March 3, 1946, p. 27.

39 *Harijan*, April 21, 1946, p. 95.
40 *Harijan*, May 5, 1946, p. 116.
41 *Harijan*, June 2, 1946, p. 160.
42 *Ibid.*
43 *Harijan*, September 8, 1946, p. 296.
44 *Harijan*, April 14, 1946, p. 80.
45 *Harijan*, September 8, 1946, p. 296.
46 Gandhiji's answers to questions put by United Press of India, November 6, 1946.
47 *Harijan*, October 20, 1946, p. 364.
48 *Ibid.*
49 *Harijan*, July 14, 1946, p. 220.
50 *Harijan*, April 7, 1946, p. 74.
51 *Harijan*, April 14, 1946, p. 80.
52 *Harijan*, October 6, 1946, p. 338.
53 *Ibid.*
54 Dr. Rajendra Prasad, *India Divided*, Bombay, 1947, p. 216.
55 Lord Pethick-Lawrence in *Mahatma Gandhi*, by Polak, Brailsford and Pethick-Lawrence, London, 1949, p. 313.
56 *Harijan*, October 6, 1946, p. 339.
57 *Harijan*, April 28, 1946, p. 101.
58 *Ibid.*
59 *Ibid.*
60 *Young India*, January 23, 1930, p. 27.
61 *Harijan*, October 13, 1940, p. 318.
62 *Harijan*, April 7, 1946, p. 70.
63 *Ibid*, p. 73.
64 *Harijan*, April 14, 1946, p. 80.
65 *Ibid.*
66 *Harijan*, June 18, 1938, p. 152.
67 *Harijan*, May 5, 1946, p. 114.
68 *Harijan*, October 20, 1946, p. 368.
69 *Harijan*, May 5, 1946, p. 114.
70 *Ibid.*
71 *Ibid.*
72 *Harijan*, July 28, 1946, p. 244.
73 *Harijan*, June 9, 1946, p. 169.
74 *Harijan*, September 1, 1940, p. 268.
75 *Harijan*, November 17, 1946, p. 404.
76 Gandhiji, *From Yeravda Mandir*, Ahmedabad, 1935, p. 2.
77 *Harijan*, July 14, 1946, p. 217.
78 Gandhiji, *An Autobiography*, Ahmedabad, 1929, Vol. II, p. 591.
79 Gandhiji quoted in Mirabehn, *Gleanings*, Ahmedabad, 1949, p. 19.
80 *Ibid*, p. 24.
81 *Ibid.*

82 *Harijan*, June 13, 1936, p. 141.

83 Gandhiji quoted in Mirabehn, *Gleanings*, Ahmedabad, 1949, p. 19.

84 Edvin Arnold, *The Song Celestial* (being English translation in verse of *Bhagavad Gita*) Chapter II, verses 67-72.

85 G. T. Wrench, *The Restoration of Peasantries*, London, 1939, p. 18.

86 Gandhiji, *An Autobiography*, Ahmedabad, 1927, Vol. I, p. 7.

87 *Ibid.*

88 Gandhiji's address on voluntary poverty delivered in Maud Royden's Church, London, 1931.—Speight, *Indian Masters of English*, Calcutta, 1934.

89 Gandhiji, *From Yeravda Mandir*, Ahmedabad, 1935, p. 37.

90 As in 88 above.

91 *Ibid.*

92 Address delivered in the Y.M.C.A. Auditorium, Madras, February 16, 1916,—Prabhu and Rao, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, Madras, 1946, p. 182.

93 Gandhiji, *From Yeravda Mandir*, Ahmedabad, 1935, p. 38.

94 Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, London, 1952, pp. 347-48.

95 *Harijan*, September 1, 1940, p. 268.

96 Gerald Heard to Pyarelal, March 3, 1949.

97 *Harijan*, September 29, 1946, p. 336.

98 *Harijan*, November 3, 1946, p. 383.

99 *Harijan*, October 20, 1946, p. 367.

100 *Ibid.*

101 *Harijan*, September 29, 1946, p. 332.

GLOSSARY

Ahimsa: non-violence; love.
Ashram: a retreat or home for community living.
Atman: spirit; soul.
Ayurveda: the Hindu system of medicine.
Badi: homestead or a cluster of homesteads.
Bajri: dressing made from a silicious red stone.
Bhajan: song.
Bhangi: a sweeper or scavenger.
Brahmachari: one who observes Brahmacharya.
Brahmacharya: observance of chastity or continence in the quest of Truth that is God.
Charkha: spinning wheel.
Chowkidar: watchman.
Dab: tender green coconut.
Dao: a heavy curved knife universally used in Bengal.
Darshan: sight; inner vision.
Dharma: duty.
Dharmashala: a free travellers' inn endowed by public or private philanthropy.
Harijan: literally child of God; a name coined by Gandhiji to describe the so-called untouchables.
Hartal: suspension of work as a mark of protest or mourning.
Himsa: violence.
Jamadar: watchman; a rank in the police.
Jehad: religious crusade.
Kachery: in Noakhali, zamindar's office where tenants pay their dues.
Khadi: hand-spun and hand-woven cloth.
Khal: canal.
Lathi: a wooden staff or stick.
Lungi: a short loin-cloth universally worn by Muslims in East Bengal.
Ma-Bap: literally father and mother. Sometimes applied to a benevolent autocratic system of Government.
Mahatma: a great soul.
Maidan: ground, open space.
Mandir: temple.
Mantras: sacred verses.
Maulana: a title of respect applied to Muslims.
Maulvi: a religious preacher.
Musafirkhana: a travellers' rest-house or inn.
Ramanama: the name of Rama—incarnation of God in Hindu religion.

Sadhana: striving; practice.

Samadhi: a monument erected over the ashes of the deceased, or the site of cremation.

Sannyasi: a recluse.

Sari: a long piece of cloth worn by Indian woman.

Sati (same as Sutee): a saintly woman; also a Hindu woman who immolates herself on the funeral pyre of her husband; the practice of Sati.

Satyagraha: literally, holding on to truth; truth-force or soul-force.

Satyagrahi: one who practises Satyagraha.

Sevak: servant.

Shamiana: a canopy.

Shanko: a single log bridge with or without side-rails.

Sherwani: Indian style of coat with closed collar.

Sthitaprajna: a man with steady intellect.

Swadeshi: literally, of one's own country. In economics the doctrine of preferential use of the products of one's own country.

Swaraj: self-rule.

Takli: distaff or twirligig used for spinning cotton or wool.

Tal: rhythmic beating of time with the hands during singing.

Taluqdars: hereditary revenue collectors created under the early British rule in India.

Tapashcharya: austerity; penance.

Tejas: radiance.

Teta: a many-pronged spear.

Thana: police-station.

Tunai: a process of carding cotton with the fingers.

Vaishnava: votary of the cult of Vishnu.

Vaitalik: song of God's praise sung in the morning.

Yajna: sacrifice.

Zamindar: a landlord.

INDEX

[Short forms used in the Index are : G. for Gandhiji, C. for Congress, C.A. for Constituent Assembly, J. for Jinnah and M.L. for Muslim League.]

